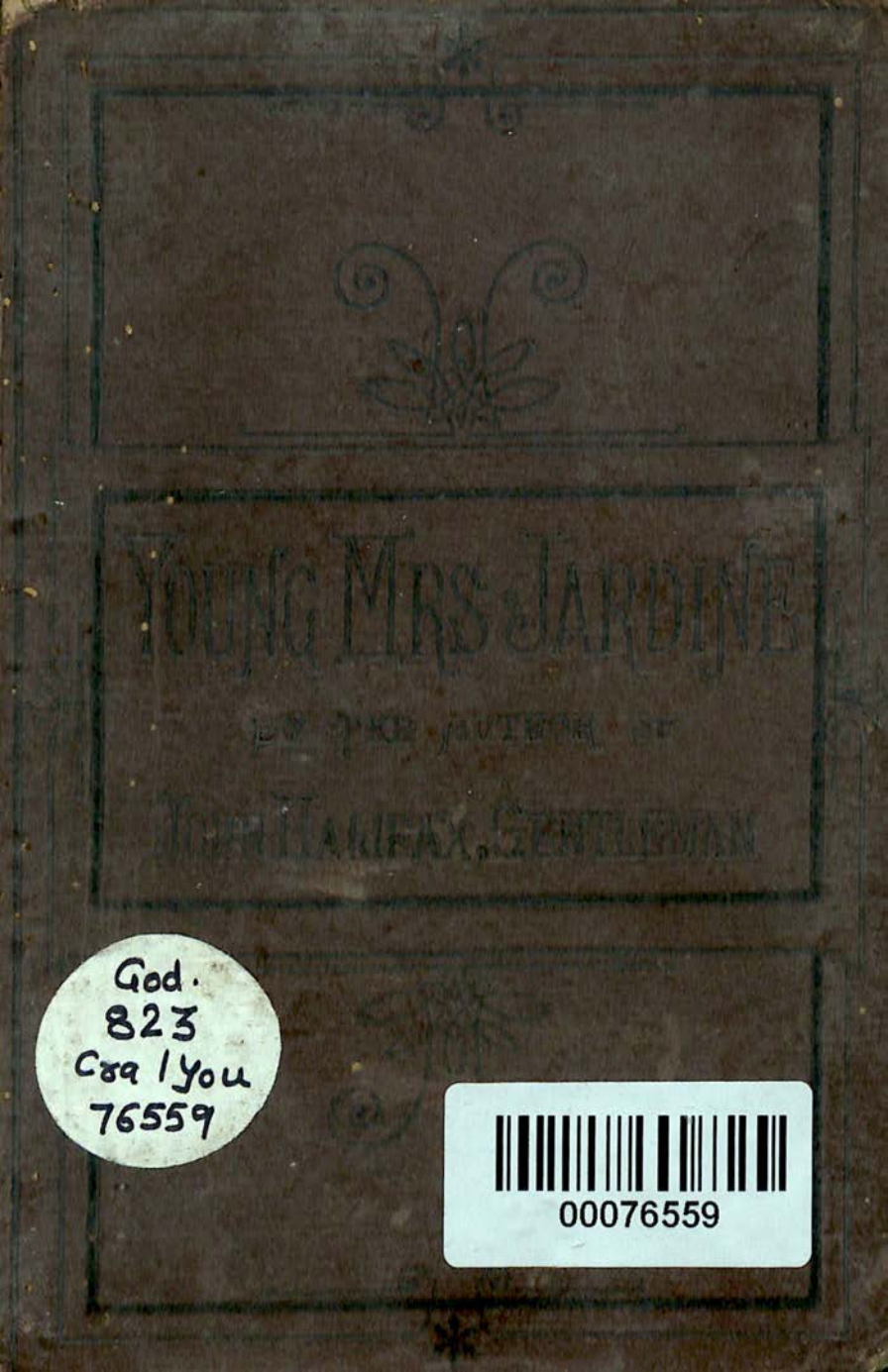

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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

VOL. III.

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BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN HALIFAX, GENTLEMAN,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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YOUNG MRS. JARDINE.

CHAPTER I.

Husband and Wife.

THE very day after their return to Blackhall, Roderick, with a cheerful countenance, put his luckless MS. on the topmost shelf of the old oaken press in the dining-room, where nobody could get at it by anything short of a most resolute will and a step-ladder.

"Lie there, my *magnum opus!* till I have gathered sufficient *opes* to publish you at

my own expense, and distribute a copy each to all my friends, who then will have become so numerous that I shall clear off thereby at least the first edition. For the rest"—seeing, though his wife tried to smile, her eyes were brimming—"never mind, love, even if your husband was not born to be a writer—at any rate, a novel-writer—I may come out in another line, as a moral essayist, perhaps; or, who knows! having, they say, a little of my grandfather in me. I may drop, or rise, into a capital man of business after all."

"What do you mean?" she asked, timidly.

"Something of which I have been thinking all night, and am going to speak to Black about this morning," said Roderick,

taking down his hat. "Never let grass grow under your feet when you have made up your mind to a thing. I may not have much 'mind'—according to our friends, the publishers—but I have got a will of my own; and I am determined to be a rich man yet. At least, rich enough to keep Blackhall from dropping into ruins. Not this century, please God, shall any enterprising author write an improving work on 'The Last of the Jardines.'"

Gaily as he spoke, there was deep earnest beneath the jest—the earnestness of a man who has courage enough to take his fate into his own two hands, and, however heavily weighted, prepare to run the race of life without complaining. True, the

race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong—many a one, without fault of his own, flags, staggers, drops, and dies; still that man is not half a man who, with youth and health on his side, shrinks at the outset from either disappointed ambition, or fear of poverty, or any other of those nameless terrors which come with later life. Especially when he has not to fight single-handed, or for himself alone.

There is a creed abroad that a young man is better alone, free from all encumbrance of wife or children; but in the old times it was not so. Then children were esteemed "an heritage and gift that cometh from the Lord"—now, selfish luxury, worldliness, and the love of out-

ward show, have brought our young men —ay, and some women too—to such a pass that they feel, nay, openly declare, every child born to them is a new enemy; and marriage, instead of being "honourable" to all, is a folly, a derision, or a dread.

Why is this? And is it the men's fault or the women's? Both, perhaps; yet, I think, chiefly the women's. Feeble, useless, half-educated; taught to believe that ignorance is amusing, and helplessness attractive; no wonder the other sex shrinks from taking upon itself not a help but a burden—charming enough before marriage —but after? The very man who at first exulted in his beautiful ornamental wife, his sweet, humble Circassian slave, will,

by-and-by, be the first to turn round and scorn her.

No man could ever scorn Silence Jardine. In spite of her sacred feebleness, she resumed at once the business of life—harder than anybody knows who has not tried the experiment of making sixpence do the work of a shilling. And she did it cheerfully, without any outward sign. Brain never idle; feet never still, or, if compelled to stillness, hands always busy at something or another; full of endless care and thought for others, most of all for Roderick, who never thought of himself or his own pleasure at all; even in her room, or on her sofa, Mrs. Jardine managed to be the very soul of the house, planning everything, arranging

everything, and, it often seemed, doing everything.

It was a solitary life she led, for her husband took to going down to the mill every day, and all day long; it "amused" him, he said, and indeed he always came home looking so busy and cheerful that she was glad of the change for him. But it was a life of perfect peace. And then, it was full of day-dreams.

"Are you not dull sometimes?" said Roderick one day, when he came in a little earlier than usual, and found her sitting sewing by the fading October light, but with such a placid smile on her lips, such a silent bliss in her eyes.

"Dull? How could I be? I was only thinking."

"I have been thinking too; only I would not tell you till I was quite sure of myself," said he, as he sat down beside her. "Silence, I do really believe your husband is not such a goose as he seems. Black says so; and Black, though an oddity, is by no means a bad fellow."

Silence smiled. She had oftentimes battled against her husband's dislike to the honest man, whose roughness "rubbed him up the wrong way," as he said, even worse than Mrs. Maclagan. Now under the rough rind he had discovered the pleasant kernel. Things had evidently righted themselves.

"He objected to me strongly at first because I was a gentleman, which was as great a delusion in its way as my setting

him down a boor because he wore a rough coat, and had manners to match. Now we both understand one another better. I have been working with him at the mill for fourteen days, and what do you think is the result?"

He spoke with a buoyancy of tone and manner such as Silence had not seen in him for weeks.

"Something is going to happen—that is, if my wife does not object, which, being a very sensible woman, I don't think she will. I am actually going to earn my daily bread."

She turned round—her lips quivering.

"Now don't begin to cry about it, Mrs. Jardine, my dear; it isn't breaking stones upon the road, or anything very dreadful;

and the bread I shall earn will not be too luxurious—only two pounds a week —one hundred pounds a year, which is my precise value just at present. Flattering!—but it is something. I am rather proud of my position as bread-winner—I that never earned a halfpenny in all my days."

He spoke a little fast, and with a flushed cheek. She put her hand upon his, and held it with a soft, firm hold.

"Tell me all."

"There is not very much to tell. You know how fond I always was of machinery —indeed, once I begged to be made an engineer, but my—they at home" (he never named his mother now) "thought the profession was not 'genteel' enough,

and it is too late now, Black says. But he also says, as a mill-owner I might find my turn for mechanics extremely useful. I could watch, examine, perhaps, even invent; indeed, during these two weeks, I have made a suggestion or two which he is pleased to consider 'admirable.' 'Mr. Jardine,' he said to me this morning, 'if you were but a capitalist and could start a mill, or a working man who required to earn your bread as overseer or foreman—you'd do.' And I startled him by telling him I was a working man, and I did require to earn my bread; and, if he thought I deserved foreman's wages, I would take them gratefully, and——Why, Silence, my darling! Not crying?"

But she was, though she dried her tears at once. "Oh, Roderick! and this is done for me!"

"For you and—it," he whispered, and then there was a long pause of speechless peace.

"I don't wish to make myself out a martyr, not the least in the world," said Roderick, at last. "I like my work—I like all work, indeed, but this especially. And Black is by no means a bad fellow to work with when you only know him. There is that great difference in our ages which prevents jarring—and then he has such a veneration for the family."

"Yes, that is it. But there, too, lies the difficulty. To be foreman at a cotton-

mill! You, a gentleman and a Jardine! Have you considered?"

"It is because I am a gentleman and a Jardine that I do not need to consider," he answered, with that slight air of hauteur which, whether it was right or wrong, his wife loved, could not help loving, for it was a bit of himself. "No, dear; in my worst, that is, my idlest days, I never was so foolish as to think there was any disgrace in work, any dignity in idleness; and now, when I have to earn my bread in the sweat of my brow, like old Adam and all the rest, down to poor grandfather Paterson, I'll do it, and not be ashamed of it either."

"Nor I. Nothing that my husband did could make me ashamed of him, ex-

cept his doing something wrong. But now——"

She stopped, her voice choking; and again, weak-minded little woman that she was, she cried—they both cried. Then they gathered up their courage for the new life which began the next Monday morning.

It might have been—possibly any person more worldly-wise than these two would have said decidedly it was—that this two pounds a week, so important to them, came out of the softest bit in old Black's heart, rather than his full and usually tightly-shut purse, seeing it would be some months before an ignorant "gentleman," however capable, could be equal in value to an experienced working-man,

even as foreman at a mill. But they did not know this, and without another word both cheerfully accepted the new life which was to begin the next Monday morning.

The hardest bit of it was the long hours —the separation from the dusk of the morning till after nightfall. Sometimes Roderick came in so tired that, instead of talking, he would just throw himself down —not on the sofa, that he always left for her, but on the rug at her feet—and fall asleep till bedtime; while she, anxious to use her busy fingers to the last available minutes, sewed silently, watching him the while. If he had seen that watch! Does a man ever thoroughly comprehend how a woman loves him?

But, the working-days done, there were the blessed Sundays: he never knew how blessed, he said, till he became "a working man." Church over, his wife sent him to take a long stroll over the hills, while she gathered round her for an hour the little class of mill-girls, taught for so many years by Miss Jardine.

Roderick sometimes grumbled at this, but she said, gently,

"We each do our work. I think this is mine: let me do it!"

And by the time he came to tea it was done, and the jealous fellow had his wife to himself for the whole evening.

Those sweet Sunday evenings, when "the rain was on the roof"—for winter set in early that year—how comfortable

they were! The two, shut in together, had to learn the great secret, and go through the hardest test of married life—even such young married life as theirs—constant companionship. Not love, not passion, scarcely even affection—for all these can sometimes exist without it, at least for a long time—but simple companionship, that priceless friendship which is "love without his wings."

"Suppose you had been a goose, Silence," he said one day. "Suppose you had expected me to be always making love to you, instead of talking to you like a sensible woman: suppose you had not cared for the things I care for, but wanted something totally different—say dressing and dancing, and going out of evenings—

what in the world would have become of me?"

She laughed merrily.

"And suppose you had been a man of the world, who liked good dinners and brilliant society, and was ashamed of his poor little wife because she was not clever——"

"Nonsense!"

"Not clever," she repeated, with a sweet decision, "after the fashion that is called clever; nor beautiful, nor grand; had brought him no money and given him no position—I don't speak often of this, but I know it all. Suppose, Roderick, you had been different from what you are; I wonder what would have become of me! No, no!" and her gaiety melted into an

almost sad seriousness. "Whatever the future brings we have the present. Let us rejoice in it, and—let us thank God."

In his old life Roderick had seldom thought of this. Now, when every night he saw his wife kneel down by her bedside, he had come instinctively to kneel beside her, "saying his prayers" as the children do; or rather, since with her always near him there seemed nothing left to pray for, just whispering in his heart "Thank God!" As he did now—ay, and many a time in the day, in the midst of his work, which was not too pleasant sometimes. But it grew pleasant and easy when there flashed across him the vision of the sweet face at home—no longer the ideal mistress of his dreams,

but the dear wife of his bosom, always at hand to lighten his burdens and divide his cares.

"Poor old Black!" he said one day—or rather night—when, after toiling, soaked through, up the steep brae, he sat down a few minutes after, dry and warm, by the bright fire, holding the little hands which had served him so lovingly. "Poor Black, whom I left in his large, handsome, empty house! I am quite sorry for all old bachelors."

"Thank you, dear."

"Though he told me once, in a confidential moment, that his life had been so hard he was often glad there had been no one to share it."

"He was mistaken."

"I think he was mistaken," Roderick said, pressing his lips on the smooth brow and bright brave eyes that looked on life utterly without fear, so long as it was a life with love in it. "I cannot believe that any man is the weaker, but the stronger, for having a woman to help him. Only he must choose a woman who *can* help him—as I did."

"You are very conceited," she said, gaily, and then clung to him passionately. "Two together; I can bear anything if we are two together. But if you had left me to go through my life alone——" A kind of shiver passed through her. "Some have to bear it, and do: Cousin Silence did. And I would have borne it too—I told you so once. I would have lived a

busy, useful life. I would not have died. But oh! the difference, the difference!"

"And oh! the difference to me!" he said, as he clasped her to his heart, and felt the peace and strength she gave him. And then, coming back to common things, he added, "Poor old Black! he has been just a trifle 'difficult' of late; he is not the best temper in the world, and he likes you so much, you perhaps might smooth him down. If I bring him home with me to-morrow, can you give us some supper, Mrs. Jardine?"

CHAPTER II.

All the World and his Wife.

IN the dusk of the next evening, the tall young fellow, handsome and strong, and the bent old figure with the brown wig and yellow gaiters, appeared at the front door, which the mistress always herself opened for her husband.

"I was going to introduce *the* visitor," said he, "for we never have any other: but look here! I feel like Robinson Crusoe when he saw the footmark on the shore.

Wheels! horses' feet! Mrs. Jardine, you must have been entertaining a carriage and pair?"

"Two carriages and pairs! They have only just gone. And they were so very nice."

"The carriages?"

"'No, the people. Such 'nice' people: is not that your English word—*gentil, agréable, charmant?*"

"She is going back to her French again—the renegade!"

"No, I am thoroughly Scotch now. Mr. Black knows it," said she, as with gentle, almost filial hands she took off the old man's plaid and bonnet, and set him in the arm-chair, he submitting with astonishing meekness; but all old people,

just as all children, loved and submitted to Silence.

"How bright your eyes look! Did your visitors talk French with you, my darling?"

"A little, for they had been a great deal abroad. But they were so simple and kindly, not grand or over-dressed like"—she stopped.

"Like other friends of ours, whom, being friends, we will not criticise," said Roderick, with a kind of sad dignity. It had been a sore vexation to him that, except the Griersons, nearly all the Scotch-women his wife had met were of the class of Mrs. Maclagan, that exaggeration of national qualities which people of one country constantly make the type of ano-

ther. "But, my dear, who are your visitors? Mr. Black will be sure to know them."

"Ou, ay; but they would never condescend to know me," said the old man, fingering, with a half-comical awe, the cards on the table. "Sir John and Lady Symington, of Symington; Mr. and Mrs. Mac Alister, of Castle Torre. I told you, sir,"—he always addressed Roderick out of business hours as "sir," and Silence as "madam"—"the gentry of the neighbourhood would soon be finding out that there were again Jardines at Blackhall. Besides, Sir John and your father were lads thegither, and Mac Alister, of Torre—he was a bit bairn then."

"Yes," said Silence, after a puzzled

pause at the Scotch words, which, when he forgot himself, the old man continually brought in. "Yes, they told me so. They spoke of *him*—Roderick, you would have liked to hear how they spoke of your father. And they said they hoped we should be good neighbours, and meet very often."

Roderick looked pleased—it is but human nature to enjoy being "respeckit like the lave"—but suddenly he clouded over. "Don't let us talk of this; it is impossible."

Silence was so astonished at the tone as well as the words that the natural, innocent "Why?" died on her lips. She turned away, and began talking to Mr. Black of something else, asking no more

questions, nor referring again to the visitors, who, Roderick saw with pain, had evidently charmed her, and been a little brightness in the long, empty day.

He told her so when the old man departed, after a rather dull two hours; for the master of the house was very silent, and when he did speak there was once or twice the faintest shade of discontent in his tone, a sort of half apology for their simple *ménage* and frugal fare, of which Silence took no outward notice. She had given her guest the best she had—given it with a warm heart too, and a grateful—for Mr. Black had been very kind, and many a brace of grouse and bunch of grapes had found their way from the Mill-house to Blackhall.

"And I think he knows our ways, and does not expect us to requite him with turtle and venison," said the young hostess.

"Perhaps not; he knows the barrenness of the land," answered Roderick, sharply —very sharply for him. "But other folks do not know, and need not. Your magnificent visitors, for instance. I hope you did not let them penetrate beyond the drawing-room, or invite them to stay to tea, lest they might quote the famous lines—

'Love in a hut with water and a crust,
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust.'"

"I think you may well ask Love to forgive you, dear," Silence answered, not echoing the laugh, which was scarcely a

merry laugh. "Yes, I offered them tea, for I liked them, and I wanted them to stay till you came home, thinking you would like them too. They did stay, as long as they possibly could, and we had a pleasant talk, and Janet was baking, so I gave them some hot scones, and——"

"What charming hospitality! It must have reminded them of Caleb Balderstone's. Why, my dear wife, we shall soon have to set up a Caleb Balderstone, since Blackhall has grown into a sort of Wolf's Hope. Silence, my darling"—taking her face between his hands, and trying hard to curb his excessive irritation—"you are the sweetest and simplest of women; but—you must not invite people

here again. Not people such as these. They would only go home and laugh at us. I don't care for myself: I can dine off porridge and salt—it would not harm me—but I cannot bear the world to know it. We must put the best on the outside."

She looked up, more than surprised—startled. Evidently there was something in the woman's nature—larger or smaller, who shall decide?—which could not understand the man's at all.

"Never mind, however, for this once. We'll hire a fly—a carriage and pair, perhaps, in noble emulation—return these visits, and any others with which the 'gentry of the neighbourhood,' as old Black called them, may condescend to

honour us—and so end it all. To keep up acquaintance with them is, as I said, simply impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Can you not see? Birds of a feather *must* flock together—it is a natural law. These people are the 'magnates of the county,' and we the impoverished Jardines of Blackhall. Besides, did you tell them—it was just like you, my innocent one, to do it—that I am also foreman of the cotton-mill?"

Again she looked at him, in quiet surprise. He seemed so very unlike himself.

"If I had told them, would it have mattered very much?"

"Certainly not—to me. But I think it

would to them. Dear, a man is always despised for being poor; and—I will not be despised. I can live upon bread and water, dress in fustian—or rags if necessary: but my wife will prevent that," added he, tenderly. "Only our poverty must not betray itself. If we appear in the world at all, it must be as Mr. and Mrs. Jardine of Blackhall. Whatever we suffer, let us 'die and make no sign.' Or, even to go a little further, let us imitate that very reserved gentleman of whom his valet said, 'Master's dead, sir —but he doesn't wish it to be generally known.'"

Silence did not laugh at the stale joke, which indicated a long under-current of bitter thought, now welling up to the

surface: but she attempted no remonstrance.

"My friend"—the old tender "mon ami"—"do not be angry with me. I liked these people because I thought you would like them too, and that a little society would be good for you; but since it cannot be——"

"Since it cannot be," he repeated, decisively, "we will not trouble ourselves about it, or them. Doubtless our neighbours will trouble themselves very little about us—at least, as soon as they know all facts concerning us, which, of course, they very soon will. Never mind, my wife. Kiss me, and be happy! We are happy, are we not? Let the world go its way—who cares?"

But it was evident he did care; and when, after a week or two, he found he had been mistaken, and people did "trouble themselves" about the young Jardines, inasmuch that, by-and-by, "everybody," either from friendliness, respect, or curiosity, had called at Blackhall—whether pleased or vexed, Roderick was certainly interested.

"Well, and who has been here to-day?" was always his first question on coming up from the mill; sometimes adding, with a bitter earnest underlying the jest, that he hoped she had told all her grand neighbours that her husband was "out at work,"—his daily work as foreman of the mill.

"Yes. I thought you wished every-

body to know? It could not matter, you being a gentleman and a Jardine. You once said so."

"And I say so still, in my best moments; but in my worst—— Well, I suppose, we men are great cowards—moral cowards. No matter, I am glad the murder's out. You did it for the best, my wife: and it is the best, for they will never come again, depend upon it."

But, strange to say, they did; and at last it became absolutely necessary to return these friendly visits.

"I will beg a holiday from my master"—poor Roderick! he sometimes took a savage pleasure in the word. "We will hire the village fly, and go in state: appearing for once as respectable people

—Mr. and Mrs. Jardine of Blackhall."

"I think we are respectable people," the wife answered; she had learned not to be hurt at these accidental bitternesses. "We are well-born, well-bred; we live in our own pretty house; we pay our debts; and we stint nobody—except ourselves, perhaps."

Herself, she might have said, for her husband, simple as he was in all his ways, wonderfully so, considering his up-bringing, never suspected how many domestic and personal sacrifices were necessary, that she might in a sense, though not the sense he had meant it, really "put the best on the outside" for him when he came home.

He was at home so little now that the

whole day's holiday—they two together—was quite a treat to look forward to. But when, instead of the village fly, which Mr. Black had offered to order for them, there came up his own well-appointed but rarely used carriage, with his compliments, and the horses had not been out for a week, would Mrs. Jardine oblige him by using them?—then Roderick's pride rose up at once.

"Make Mrs. Jardine's compliments to Mr. Black, and she regrets extremely that——"

A hand laid on his arm—a whisper which always fell on his jarring nerves like a soft finger-touch on a quivering harp-string.

"Dear, yesterday, when I was thanking

Mr. Black for all his kindness, he said—you know his quick, husky way of speaking—'Madam, you may have a hard life—I rather think you will—but I hope you will never know one hardship—to find yourself in your old age without one single human being whom you have a right to be kind to.'"

"Poor old fellow!" said Roderick, much moved. "My little Conscience! you are right. John, tell your master he is exceedingly kind, as he always is; and Mrs. Jardine will enjoy her drive extremely."

So she did—to an almost pathetic degree—for it was weeks since she had been outside the garden gate. And the whole world was so lovely that still November

day—November, but bright as June—it often is so in Scotland—all the fading landscape looking as beautiful as an old face sometimes looks to eyes that loved it when it was young.

These two, sitting side by side and hand-in-hand, though they hid the latter fact under a kindly plaid from John the coachman—were young still; to them the dying year brought only a charming sadness. They were very happy, and all the happier, Roderick declared, because in their circuit of nearly twenty miles, owing to the rarely fine day, they found everybody "out" except one family—the Symingtons.

Sir John—a "fine old Scottish gentleman" of the last generation—with his old

wife beside him, still keeping the remains of that delicate English beauty which had captured him fifty years ago, was, even Roderick owned, quite a picture. And they remembered his father; and they had known Cousin Silence. Their greeting was more than courteous—friendly; and their house, upon which, being childless, they had expended all they had to spend, was full of art-treasures collected abroad, each with a history and an interest. The old couple seemed still to have the utmost enjoyment in life, and to have the faculty of making others enjoy life too.

"I knew you would like them," said Silence, when, having sent the carriage away, they walked home through the wood-path, which, Sir John carefully

pointed out to them, made Symington only a quarter of an hour's distance from Blackhall.

"Yes, I like them. That is just the sort of house I should care to go to, if I could go. Lucky folk these Symingtons. They seem to have had everything heart can desire."

"Not quite. Did you see a miniature over Lady Symington's arm-chair? She saw me looking at it, and said—you should have heard the tone, quiet as she is—'That was our only son—my one child! He died at seven years old.' I think," Silence continued, softly, "if you do not mind, I should like now and then to go and see Lady Symington."

Her husband pressed her arm, and then said, suddenly,

"My innocent wife, what a happy way you have of taking everything!"

"It is because I am so happy."

"And I—yes, I ought to be happy too, God knows! But——"

She put her hand upon his lips.

"God *does* know. And I know too. Many things are very hard for you to bear—much harder for you than for me. We will not speak of them, we will just bear them. We can bear them, I think, together."

"Yes, my darling!"

And after that he made no more "misanthropic" speeches for the whole evening.

CHAPTER III.

Telling the Truth.

A WEEK afterwards, coming back from meeting the postman, which he always did, though few letters ever came, and never those which, his wife could see, he missed and looked for still, Roderick threw down before her a heap of notes.

"Look here, dear. Evidently, as old Black says, the 'hale countrie' has fallen in love with young Mrs. Jardine. Four

invitations to dinner and one to a dance—extending over three weeks and an area of fifteen square miles. To accept them would take half our quarterly income, in carriage-hire, &c.; and to return them, why, six Caleb Balderstones could scarcely accomplish that feat."

She read, and laid the notes aside, with a rather sad face.

"You would like to go? Well, then, my darling, shall we don our purple and fine linen—we have a few rags of splendour left—and fare sumptuously at our neighbours' expense—for four days? We can starve afterwards for fourteen: I'm willing, if you are."

"Roderick!"

"Else—we must get up some excuse—

you must have a cough, and be unable to go out of evenings."

"But I am able—they may see me at church every Sunday."

"Most literal of women! Of course it is a 'big lee'—as Black would call it. But any lie will do; the bigger the better, since we cannot possibly tell the truth."

"Why not?"

The question was so direct and simple, yet so perfectly natural, that it staggered him. He laughed, though not very mirthfully, and made no reply.

"Why not tell the truth?" Silence repeated. "It would be much the easiest way. Why not say to everybody, what everybody must know, or will soon, that we are not rich enough to keep a carriage

or give entertainments, but that we appreciate our neighbours' kindliness, and will be glad to meet them whenever chance allows. Shall I write and say this? Nobody could be offended, for it is just the simple truth. And surely the truth is better than even the whitest of lies."

He had lived beside her and with her for a whole year now—this woman, so different from all other women he had ever known; and yet he seemed always to be finding out something new in her—some divine simplicity which made all his worldly wisdom useless; some innocent courage which put even his manliness to shame. But he was too truly manly not to own this.

"My darling," he said, not laughing now, "I did not propose to tell a lie—not seriously. But the truth must be hid sometimes, when it is an unpleasant and humiliating truth. Come, then, shall we make a great effort, and appear at all these fine houses *en grande tenue*, and in a carriage and pair (Black's, perhaps, borrowed for the occasion), and 'make believe,' as the children say, that we are rich people?"

"Would not that be acting a lie, which comes to the same thing as telling it? Did not your father once say so? And you once told me that if"—she paused a moment—"if you had boys you would teach them exactly as your father taught you, that either to tell or act a lie was

absolutely impossible to a gentleman and a Jardine!"

"You little Jesuit!"

"Don't call me that!" and her eyes filled with the quick tears, which, however, she rarely allowed to fall—she was not a "crying" woman. "I cannot argue, I can only feel: and think. Dearest, I sit and think a great deal—more than in all my life before. I ought, you know——"

Her head dropped, and a sudden flush came over the sweet young face, firm through all its sweetness, much firmer than even a little while ago. Her brief eight months of married life had made a woman of her. And there were the long lonely hours—alone, yet not alone—when

a wife, ever so young, cannot choose but sit thinking of what God is going to give her; of the mingled joy and fear, and solemn responsibility, stretching out into far generations. Well indeed may she say, even as the holy woman of whom it is recorded, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word."

Something of this—expressing what she never said—was written in Silence's face. Her husband could not quite understand it—no man could; but he saw the soft, tired look—tired, but not weak—there was nothing weak about her; and he put his arm round her very tenderly.

"My darling, speak; you know I will always listen to you, even though I may

differ from you. No two people can always think alike. But I wanted a wife, a counsellor; I did not want a Circassian slave."

She laughed; still she paused a little before answering. It was hard to go against him—hard to put into plain, ugly words the fact that she, a wife, dared to think her husband wrong. Dear as he was to her—this passionately loved Roderick—there was something in the other love, dimly dawning, growing daily into a mysterious yet most absolute reality, which made her at once clear-sighted and brave, with the courage that all women ought to have when they think of themselves, not as themselves, but as the mothers of the men that are to be.

"Roderick"—he was startled by the sweet solemnity of her tone—"this seems a smaller thing than it is. Whether we accept these invitations or not, matters little; but it does matter a great deal whether we begin our married life with truth or untruth; whether we meet the world with an utterly false face, or else a sullen face, rejecting all its kindnesses, instead of, with a perfectly honest face, saying openly, 'We are poor, we know, and it is not pleasant; but it is no disgrace. We are neither afraid nor ashamed.'"

"That might be very well in Utopia; but here? Did you ever know anybody who did it?"

"Yes; my father and mother did it. Yours——"

Roderick hesitated. "Perhaps my father might, only——"

They were both silent.

"Think, dearest," she continued; "it is a question not merely for to-day or to-morrow, but of all our lives. We may be poor all our lives."

"God forbid!"

The hasty mutter, the gloomy look; they went to his wife's heart, and he could see they did; but still she never shrank.

"I, too, say 'God forbid,' for I know, even better than you do, how hard poverty is. Oh, my Roderick! when I think of what I have cost you"—her voice faltered—"of all you have lost through me!"

"Lost—and gained."

"Yes, I will not lightly myself, nor underrate the woman you chose, who you thought would make you happy. And I *will* make you happy, even if we are not rich."

"'The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,'" said he, fondly. "But come, this is great nonsense, and quite beside the question. What is the question, by-the-by? for I am getting rather confused, and"—looking at his watch, "I must be off to my work. Oh, what a comfort work is! Don't you perceive that I have been twice as happy, and, therefore, twice as good, since I was a working man?"

She saw through the little loving ruse

to save her pain; it made her feel doubly the pain she was giving—was obliged to give.

"You are always good"—taking his hand, and kissing it—"and inexpressibly good to me, no matter how great a burden I am."

"The heaviest burden I ever had to carry, and the sweetest. But that is neither here nor there"—with a sudden change to seriousness, the serious, almost sad, look that sometimes came over him, showing how the youth had changed into a man, the man into a husband—truly a husband—*house-band*, the stay and support of the house. "Dear, we have chosen our lot; we cannot alter it; we would not if we could. It is not all bright; I know

that; but we must not make it darker than it is. We must not look back."

"No."

"And for the future——"

Then her strength seemed to come into her—strength born of a "farther-looking hope" than even he could take in.

"It is of that future I think," she said. "We may be poor, as I said, all our lives. I hope not; but we may. Are we, and more than we, to make life one long struggle and deceit, by 'keeping up appearances,' or are we to face the worst, to appear exactly what we are, and trust the world to accept it as such? I believe it would—at least, the good half of it. For the others, why need we care?"

Gently as she spoke, it was with a certain resoluteness, and the hand which clasped her husband's felt firm as steel.

"For me," she went on, laying her hand on his shoulder and creeping close to him, "I am so proud, both for myself and you, that, when these people invite me, I believe they really want me—me myself, and not my clothes or my carriage. And when they come to see me, I flatter myself it is really to visit *me*. And if I liked them, and felt them truly my friends, I would go and see them, and wish my husband to do the same, whether they were poor professeurs—like ours at Neuchâtel—or your English dukes and duchesses."

"Even if they said to us, as I have seen

condescendingly affixed to church doors, 'Come in your working clothes;' for I am not even a professor; I am a working man."

"Certainly; but something else as well. Look in the glass; you don't do it too often! Could anybody mistake you for anything but a gentleman?"

Roderick laughed, colouring a little.

"My dove, you are growing a veritable serpent. Mistress Eve, you tempt your Adam on man's weakest point—vanity."

"No, you are proud, not vain. Do not be afraid; I see all your faults clear as light."

"Thank you."

"As you mine, I hope; because then

we can try to cure both. Dear, we are like two little children sent to school together. We may have many a hard lesson to learn; but we *will* learn them; together."

He was silent. As she had said, things were harder for him than for her. She recognized this fully. You could have seen by her face that her heart bled for him, as people call it—that cruel "bleeding inside" which natures like hers so well understand; but she did not compromise or yield one inch even to him, and he knew her well enough by this time to be quite certain she never would.

A weak man might have resented this, have taken refuge in that foolish "I have said it, and I'll stick to it," or kept up that

obstinate assertion of masterdom which usually springs from an inward terror of slavery; but Roderick was prone to neither of these absurdities. He had that truest strength which never fears to yield, if there be a rational need for yielding.

"My wife," he said at last, taking her hand and looking up with some gravity, but not a shadow of anger, "what do you wish me to do?"

"'Do richt and fear nocht,' as your motto—our motto—says. That is all."

"What is the right?"

"The simple truth. Say it, and act it."

"How?"

"Let us tell our neighbours that we are not rich enough for what is called 'society,' but that we feel their kindness, and will accept it, whenever we can. Occasionally we will go and visit them—Symington, for instance, is quite within a walk; and when they visit us"—she smiled—"I hope I shall be able to give them a little hospitality, without need of a Caleb Balderstone."

"My darling!"

"Do not be afraid of me"—she kissed him with a slightly quivering lip. "I may be young and foolish, but I know how to keep up my husband's dignity, and my own. Now, shall I write the notes, or you?"

"You," he said, and, plunging into a

favourite book, referred to the matter no more.

At supper-time she laid before him silently a little bundle of letters, which he read, and then looked up with the brightest smile.

"What a comfort is a wife who can get one out of a difficulty! You have the prettiest way of putting things—French grace added to Scotch honesty. How do you manage it?"

"I don't know. I just say what I feel; but I try to say it as pleasantly as I can. Why not?"

"Why not indeed! Only so few do it." He looked at her, sitting at the head of his table—young, indeed, but with a sweet matronly dignity added to her wonderful

crystalline simplicity—looked at her with all his heart in his eyes. "People say that, though a man's business success rests with himself, his social status depends upon his wife. I think, whether rich or poor, I may be quite sure of mine."

A glad light was in her eyes, but she made no answer, except just asking if the letters would do.

"Yes. But, little law-giver, I see you have accepted one invitation—the Symingtons?"

"You do not object? You liked them? And they will have a house full of pleasant people for Christmas—Lady Symington told me so. It is not good for man to be alone—not even with his own wife, who is half himself, and therefore no variety.

Besides, I want you to see and be seen. I cannot bear you to hide your light under a bushel."

"Always me—nothing but me."

"It is always you—it ought to be," she cried, with that rare passion less expressed than betrayed. "You think so little of yourself that it is right some one should think of you. Everybody will by-and-by."

"We shall see. Once I had ambitions for myself."

"And now I have ambitions for you. They can wait. We are young. We bide our time. Only we'll leave nothing undone. We'll watch the turn of the tide."

"And meanwhile we'll go to the Sy-

mingtons," said he, with a smile. "You see, I let you have your own way."

"So you ought, if you think it is a right way. And I may send off these notes? You agree?"

"Yes. But," half jesting, half earnest, "suppose I had not agreed, what then? There is a little word in our English marriage service—it was not in the Swiss one, I think—'love, honour, and *obey*.'"

"The two former imply the latter; but, if an English wife does not love or honour, must she obey?"

"Would you obey?"

Silence paused a moment, and then answered softly, but very distinctly,

"No. Neither God nor man could require it of me. One *must* both honour

and love the man that one obeys, or obedience is impossible. If a wife sees her husband doing wrong she should try to prevent him; if he tells her to do wrong she should refuse, for God is higher than man, even be it one's own husband. Roderick, you might 'cut me up in little pieces,' as the children say, but not even you could make me do what I felt I ought not to do, or hinder me in doing what I thought was right."

"My little rebel! No," snatching her to his bosom, "my little Conscience—the best conscience a man can have—a wife who is afraid of nothing and nobody; not even of himself."

"And you are not angry with me?"

"Angry?—because you spoke your

mind; even though I thought one thing and you another?—as may happen many and many a time. My dearest, did I not tell you once I wanted a wife, not a Circassian slave? Time enough for you to turn slave when I turn tyrant. I may like to rule—most men do; and it is fair they should, if they rule wisely, but I should despise myself if I attempted to tyrannise. Now kiss me! Our discussion is over; our first quarrel ended."

"Not a quarrel—only a difference of opinion."

"In which each holds his own till satisfactorily convinced of the contrary."

"Or till both see that there may be a wisdom beyond both theirs, which is

perhaps the best lesson one learns in marriage. Except one!"

And for the second time she took and kissed his hand, not in humiliation or repentance—what had she to repent of?—but in that tender reverence, that entire trust, without which obedience is a fiction and love an impossibility. Then, ceasing to talk, he put her on the sofa, with her work-table beside her, and threw himself on the hearthrug at her feet, to "improve his mind," he said, and hers—by reading aloud. But, as often happened now, he was so tired that all these laudable intentions failed. He laid his head against his wife's lap and fell fast asleep with the book in his hand.

CHAPTER IV.

Coals of Fire.

"WHAT sort of people were we to meet to-night? Pleasant people, you said."

"And clever people, from Edinburgh and London, visitors in the house. Lady Symington brought one or two of them to call here to-day. I liked them."

"And I am sure they liked you, my darling," sad Roderick, with a tender pride. "Well, it will be rather nice to go

back for an hour or two to the old life; and rest one's ears from the endless buzz of machinery. Though I am fond of machinery," added he, hastily and cheerily. "It is like presiding as a temporary providence over a cosmogony of one's own making, taking care that all the wheels are kept going; doing one's utmost, and waiting calmly the final result, as one must in all things. Yes, I enjoy my work, and I mean to enjoy my play, if I am not too tired."

He had come in very tired—he often did; but, refreshed with tea and tender words, had now begun dressing for the Symington dinner, putting on his diamond studs, brushing out his curly hair; and his wife could see he rather

liked the proceeding. He was a young man still.

She was young too—not at all above the pleasure "of making herself pretty," as he told her she looked, in her white wedding-dress; with her wedding veil transmuted into a shawl. He admired her—they mutually admired one another—and took a childish pleasure in the same.

"I wish I could give you a carriage!" sighed Roderick, as he muffled her in hood and plaid, for the ten minutes' walk under the fir-woods, through the clear, frosty December night.

"I am content with my own two feet, dear. Lady Symington offered the carriage, but I declined."

"Quite right. The poorer we are the more independent we will be. Always stick to the principle, 'Owe no man anything.'"

"Except 'to love one another,'" Silence added, gently. "I can't help loving her—that sweet old lady—however rich she is. And she is so cheerful, too. How she laughed at my thick boots, and showed them to the two young ladies she had with her—most gentlemanly young ladies, who dress almost like men, and pity themselves for being only women. Now it may be very conceited of me, dear, but I never wished to be a man in all my life!"

"Thank heaven for that!" said Roderick, with such energy that they both burst out laughing, and so started merrily, lantern

in hand, through the solemn fir-wood, and across the open, breezy, star-lit moor.

Silence clung to her husband's arm. "This feels like the old days—the days when you used to walk home with us at night." She paused, and then continued in the low smothered tone which he had learned to understand now. "Did you ever think then that I loved you—that it was heaven to me just to walk beside you for a quarter of an hour? and now we walk together always—through life—into eternity. No—I shall not lose you even there."

He pressed her little hand nearer his heart, but said nothing. They walked on, watching the round, red moon, which was creeping up slowly through a cleft in the

hills. Neither said "How beautiful!" just as neither said "I am happy," but they knew it without speaking.

So they reached, two humble pedestrians, the Symington hall-door.

"Are you afraid?" asked Roderick, as they paused to let a carriage pass them—the Castle Torre carriage, full of very resplendent MacAlisters.

"Not afraid of my host and hostess, but very much afraid of the butler, the footman, and the groom of the chambers."

"Nevertheless, let us face even them," said Roderick, gaily, "for I am determined to have a pleasant evening."

It felt like it when, having passed bravely through the ordeal of the entrance-hall, they found themselves in the fine old

drawing-room, rich with the relics of a dozen generations of Symingtons, where Sir John and his wife received their guests.

There was once a popular song, "If I had a thousand a year," wherein the singer described what he would do with that noble income—counted but a small one now-a-days. But ten thousand a year —what could one do with that? I think precisely what Sir John Symington did. A rich man, of cultivated tastes, with every right to gratify them, knowing enough of sorrow to humble his heart towards God and soften it towards his neighbour; gifted with not only the power but the will to do good, and having lived long enough to reap the fruits of an

honourable youth in a calm old age—such a man is, spite of his riches, not unlikely to enter the kingdom of heaven. Ay, even in this world, as you could see by his contented look and quiet, stately bearing. They were indeed quite a picture, this old couple; he tall and thin, she round and rosy, with a cheek like a girl, and a smile like a child, as they came forward to meet the young couple, to whom life was only at its beginning.

"'Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake thou not.' Mr. Jardine, it is kind of you to come here to-day. I hope it will be not the last time by many that Blackhall honours Symington by entering its doors."

These words, spoken with antique formality, and in a rather loud tone—Sir John was slightly deaf—were heard by everybody. Everybody saw, too, how Lady Symington kissed Mrs. Jardine on both cheeks, foreign fashion, in cordial welcome. This might have been chance, or wise and kindly intention, but it had its effect. The MacAlisters, and all the other neighbours, came forward at once, ignoring both the poverty and the mill-work, and added their greetings. These "old families," as well as the clever English guests, were much simpler, Silence found, both in manners and toilettes, than the Richerden people. Very soon they made her feel thoroughly "at home." The more so as she saw her hus-

band was "at home" likewise. There is in some houses an unconscious atmosphere of domestic and social ozone, which brightens everybody. Wealth cannot give it, nor poverty take it away. As they went in to dinner, Mrs. Jardine leaning on Sir John's arm, as the stranger and the bride, she and Roderick smiled at one another, satisfied.

It was a recherché rather than a sumptuous meal, not one of those where the guests are evidently far less important than the food. And it was short, too—an hour and half being, the host said, quite enough to spend over eating and drinking. Also, not long after the ladies retired, the gentlemen followed them.

"You see, having been much abroad,

we have adopted the best of foreign customs," said Lady Symington, smiling to see Mrs. Jardine's smile at the unexpected apparition of her husband behind her chair. "Sir John likes a pleasant evening, good talk and good music, quite as well as a good dinner; and I like it much better. Indeed, I am afraid I am very fond of society."

"So are we," said Roderick, looking down on his wife's happy face. And just as his host called him to join a group of men, every one of whom was "somebody," or had done "something," he found time to whisper, "You were quite right, Silence; I am glad we came."

After that she watched him, talking, listening, and being listened to, holding

his own always with his habitual courtesy, but, nevertheless, with the firmness and self-respect of a man who has cast his lot in life, whose fate is fixed, and heart at rest, so that he is now ready for the work of the world. He stood a good way from her, scarcely looking towards her—what need? This mingling with others made both feel only the more keenly and securely the sweet inward tie—"my own, my very own!"

As she sat in her quiet corner, that passionate ambition, not for self, but a dearer self, which in some women's hearts is as strong even as love, woke up—no, it had already wakened—but it seemed to make itself felt to the very depths of her soul, until there came, added to it, another

feeling, roused by a few chance words she overheard.

"Yes, a fine fellow, a very fine fellow, indeed. What a pity he is married!"

"Do you think so?"

"Just swamped; every man is, unless he can get that *rara avis*, a wife who is a help, and not a hindrance, not only at home, but in society."

"Hush, there she is, that quiet little thing in the corner."

"Eh?"

Silence had sharp ears; at least, she seemed to hear by instinct every word that was said about her husband. As the two gentlemen passed her they saw only the composed face, the quietly folded hands, but—she had heard.

Half an hour afterwards, Roderick, a little surprised, but glad, saw her the centre of a circle, talking to all who talked to her, not only in her pretty precise English, but in French and German—there were several foreigners in this cosmopolite house. Also, when requested by Lady Symington, she went at once to the piano and sang.

It was a very simple song; their favourite, "O Nannie, wilt thou gang wi' me?" but after it came a hush, and then a burst of involuntary delight.

"Yes, that is my wife," Silence heard her husband answer to some one, very briefly, but she caught both the look and the tone. She went back to her seat, all her nervousness gone. She could face

the world now. He was not ashamed of her.

Human nature is human nature after all. Many a good man loves with patient tenderness a wife very inferior to himself; many a woman upholds faithfully before the world the man she has married, whom all the world sees, and wonders sometimes if she sees, is altogether unworthy of her. This is right, noble: but it is also a little sad. The perfect bond, the true marriage, must always be between those who not only love, but are proud of one another—as were these.

The evening slipped by fast, so fast that the guests were already leaving; but Lady Symington begged the Jardines to stay a few minutes more.

"Well, the moon is full, and our horses will not catch cold by standing," said Roderick gaily to his wife. He was so thoroughly enjoying himself that, for the first time, he did not notice the little tired face. But Lady Symington did, and put Silence in her own arm-chair, secured round by curtains, above which hung the sweet picture of the long dead boy. Upon it the eyes of both women, the young and the old, met tenderly.

"He must have been so pretty," Silence said.

"Yes. Almost like an angel, or it seems so now. He was a Christmas child. This Christmas he would have been thirty-nine, no, forty years old. How strange!"

The old lady spoke calmly, as old people learn to do. And then, like one habituated to repress herself, and think of others only, she added,

"Your husband is not near forty yet; he could not be, for Henry Jardine married late in life. Sir John lost sight of him after that, but he was always very fond of him. We thought him so clever, so sure to make a name for himself one day. Perhaps his son will."

"I hope he will; yes, he shall."

The words were brief, but there was a sudden flash in the eye, indicating the faith which creates the hope, and the will which brings about both. And then, startled at herself, Silence shrank back behind the curtains of her pleasant nook,

glad to hide for a few quiet minutes after the efforts even of their happy evening.

She strained her ears to catch her husband's voice, but instead she only heard the idle buzz of conversation behind her, little heeded, until her own name struck her ear.

"Jardine? surely I met a Mrs. Jardine at Richerden last week. Could she be a relation, mother or aunt, to that young fellow? Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"Oh, Mrs. MacAlister" (the speaker was one of the Symington guests), "if you had seen her! Astonishing in accent, and still more astonishing in dress; clannish, as I suppose you Scotch would call

her—always talking of her 'family,' and evidently considering it the most important family in all Scotland. She had three daughters—one married to a man, Thomson—ugh! a nice son-in-law to have! You should have seen him in the drawing-room after dinner. But she never spoke of any son."

"Still I believe this is her son."

"You don't say so! That coarse, ignorant, vulgar woman?"

At this talk—heard quicker than it takes to write, and impossible not to hear, for the speakers were behind the curtain—Silence looked at her companion, whose eyes were cast down on the carpet. Making some remark quite foreign to the subject, Lady Symington rose; then, see-

ing the poor little scarlet face, she let all polite pretences drop.

"My dear, 'les absents ont toujours tort.' Let it pass—we will move away."

"How can I let it pass? It is not true. And she is his mother. It cannot be true."

"If it were," said the old lady, quietly, "it could not affect any right-minded people. Your husband is, what he is, a Jardine of Blackhall, and the very image of his father."

"Still a mother is a mother always. I had one once."

In another moment, putting aside Lady Symington's detaining hand, she stood before the two ladies.

"I beg your pardon, but I overheard

you. I could not help overhearing. You mistake. Mrs. Jardine, my mother-in-law, is a very good woman. Her children love her much. Uneducated she may be —her father was a working man—but 'coarse,' 'vulgar'—it is impossible."

"Whether or not," said the young London lady, equally touched and surprised, "I am sorry I said it. It is a certificate of merit to any woman that her son's wife should be so fond of her."

The poor little face, pale with pain, flushed visibly. "It is not that—it is because of the injustice. One should never let an injustice pass if one can help it."

The eager voice, pathetic even in its indignant pride, the manner so simple

and straightforward—Mrs. MacAlister said next day that young Mrs. Jardine was the oddest and most "unconventional" young lady she ever knew; but there was no mistaking her meaning. Both ladies felt themselves, as the younger expressed it, "quite shut up," and made no end of incoherent apologies.

Silence accepted them, smiling. "It does not matter, since only I heard you—not my husband."

Just then, turning round, she saw Roderick standing beside Lady Symington, and was quite certain, by the expression of his face, that he had heard, or guessed, everything that had passed.

He said nothing—what was there to say?—only came forward, bowing with

almost more than his usual rather stately courtesy to the two ladies, drew his wife's arm in his, and, making their adieux to their hostess, took her away immediately.

Not until they had got out into the dark—the quiet, soothing, solitary night—did he break out in a passion of anger and grief.

"Coarse! vulgar! how dared they say it? Ignorant she may be. How could she be otherwise with her up-bringing? But she is, as you said, a thoroughly good woman. Thank you for saying it; thank you, my darling, for being so generous to my poor mother."

"Not generous, only just," whispered the soothing voice. "I could not be un-

just to any mother, least of all to yours. They did not know her, those people, and they were sorry. You heard them say so."

"I heard all; I was close by; but how could I speak? Coward that I was! It was you who were brave. Again, thank you, my darling."

They walked on awhile in total silence, then Roderick burst out again.

"Yes; she is my mother. No unkindness can alter that. And she has done nothing really wrong—nothing that can make me cease to respect her. Her weaknesses—I know them, every one. It is nonsense to say children should not see their parents' faults; they must, and do. But then there is the love that

covers all. She loved me, too, once. If I saw her this minute, I believe I should forget everything, except that she was my mother—my dear old mother."

And a great sudden sob, like a boy's, betrayed what his wife had long guessed, the pent-up grief which even she could not wholly heal.

It was hard, very hard; but Silence was neither hurt nor offended. "Faithful in one thing—faithful in all," she murmured. Clasping both her hands round his arm, she crept still closer to the true heart; all the truer and dearer because even its love for herself had failed to deaden any other lawful tenderness.

"Forgive me, my wife. You must not think that- ——"

"I think only of you, and of your bitter pain."

"It must be conquered, and shall, by-and-by."

"Or else—the tide may turn; who knows?"

"No, I have little hope of that. My mother has strong prejudices. In one sense she is, as they called her, a thorough Scotchwoman; a warm friend, a bitter enemy. No, no, do not give me hope of things changing. Better let us submit to the inevitable. It is inevitable now."

They walked a little way in sad silence, then Roderick broke out again.

"Did you hear what they said about Bella's husband? Poor Bella! I knew it

would come to that; I told her so, but she would not believe me. She was dazzled, blinded, over-persuaded. Girls often are, I suppose. Perhaps I ought to have spoken out more thoroughly; but I hated speaking, they never would understand me. And then they worried me so. Still I should have done my duty to them, whether or not. I have not liked to vex you, my darling; but sometimes I have vexed myself for days together with the doubt if I had really done my duty to them all. I cannot forget them. My dearest—my very dearest always—you would not wish me to forget them?"

"No."

"Thank you!" And then, with another half-sob, he recovered himself. "Now

we understand one another quite; so let us put it all aside. What is done we cannot undo; we would not if we could. Blood is thicker than water—especially with us Scotch—but love is beyond all, and stronger than all."

"When it is a righteous love. Ours would not have been such if it had made us do wrong. We did not do wrong. We had a right to marry if we chose. It made us happy, and it harmed no human being."

Firm and fearless, holding the balance even, and as just to herself as she would have been to any other woman, Silence spoke out. Her voice soothed and strengthened him as if it had been the voice of his own conscience.

"You are right, as I think you always are. After all, if it comes to the point, a man *must* 'leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife.' And she will cleave to him—even though he may try her a little? Do I?"

Man-like, he might have wished this fact denied; but Silence was too honest.

"Yes, dear," and just then, as they came out of the dark wood into the moonlight, her pale face seemed to gain a sort of Abdiel-like look, angelic sternness mingled with its sweetness. "Yes, dear, you do try me very much sometimes, as no doubt I do you; as all married people must, more or less, try one another; but I love you—I love you!"

"Do you? I often wonder why,"

Roderick answered, with that almost child-like humility and doubt of himself which was so pathetic, so winning.

"I love, because I honour; and, therefore, I am afraid of nothing; because nothing could make me cease to love you, except ceasing to honour. Me, myself, you might forsake, wound, torture, and, if it were for conscience sake, I should accept it all, and love you through all. But, if I ever came to despise you—as some women have come to despise their husbands—pity might last, and duty; but love would go dead out, and no power on earth would light it up again. But now—but now——"

She turned to him, her eyes shining with perfect trust—the very heart of love,

love rooted in righteousness. He turned too, and clasped her in his arms, with a passion such as even his lover-days had never felt. Then it was the restless craving after uncertain bliss. Now it was the deep content of satisfied union, each finding in the other more and more every day a perpetual refuge and rest.

"My mother told me I should soon 'get over' my love for you—and marry some other woman, who would do just as well. If it had been, and I had lost you, and had to live all my life without you! But now—Oh, Silence! what in the world should I do without you now?"

Without answering, she looked up at him, a sudden, strangely earnest look. Roderick, who had begun with a laugh, as

if anxious to get back into the light common-place of life once more, put his arm round her.

"Are you tired? Let me help you. I think I could almost carry you. Lean on me, darling."

"Yes. I always do."

And so, half led, half carried—for she was evidently very weary—they came to their own door.

CHAPTER V.

Heaping up the Coals.

"'THE bonnie blithe blink o' one's ain fireside,'" said Roderick, trying to sing, in which performance he so egregiously failed that his wife began to laugh at him.

"But how late Janet has kept the fire in," remarked she, as they watched the long, bright ray across the midnight lawn.

"Oh, you economical woman!" laughed

Roderick. "Never mind—it's only once in a way. And we have enjoyed ourselves—I was very happy at Symington. I like luxuries, as I like all pleasant things, but I can do without them. Now, there are certain things I could *not* do without."

"What are they?"

"A peaceful, sunshiny, orderly home, and a wife to love me."

She laughed merrily.

"Yes, it is a dear home, if we could only get into it." For they had found the door fastened—a rare fact—and had been ringing and ringing, till at last Janet appeared, scared and flurried.

"Have you been asleep, Janet? Nothing wrong? No ghosts frightening you?" said Roderick, kindly.

"Na, na; but the leddy, she bade me steek the door."

"What lady?"

"She came in a carriage, and said she was come to bide here. She's been waiting in the parlour these twa hours."

Roderick went hastily in, his wife following. There, still bonneted and shawled, dressed richly in velvet and fur, but with a face so haggard that it was no wonder even her brother did not at first recognize her—sat the "leddy."

"Bella!"

"Yes, it's me! You didn't know me, I suppose?"

"Dear Bell! so glad to see you." And he went over and kissed her affectionately. But Bella made no response.

"Stop a minute," she said, in a hard, dry tone. "Don't be too glad to see me. Ask your wife first. I'm not respectable. I've run away from my husband."

Roderick started.

"Not with a man—oh no, thank you! I've had enough of men," cried she, with the ghost of her old laugh—"only with a baby."

She opened her fur cloak and discovered the white long-clothes of a tiny—such a very tiny infant—with such an old, withered, ugly little face! Nevertheless, Silence sprang to it and took it in her arms.

"Oh, you're quite welcome to it, if you want it. I don't, though it's my own," said Mrs. Thomson, with another laugh. "A

month ago, when it was born, I hated the very sight of it, it was so like its father. Now—well, I endure it, that's all! Isn't it a miserable scrap of a thing?"

It certainly was; but in an instant Silence, throwing off her wraps, had sat down to warm its skinny stone-cold legs by the fire, with a look on her face that even her husband had never seen before.

"She seems born to be a mother, which I'm sure I never was; I always hated children. They look exactly like young frogs or toads. No doubt this will turn out a toad, and spit in my face, like—No, it's a feminine, not a masculine article, thank goodness! It can never grow up into a man, like *him*."

"Do you mean your husband?" said Roderick, gravely.

"To be sure. The man I was fool enough to marry. Why didn't my mother prevent me, as she tried to prevent your marriage? But mine was all right—or she thought so—as she thinks still. I've got a handsome house, horses and carriages, butler, three footmen, and a page. Didn't I dodge them all cleverly? crept out in the dark of the afternoon, and took a tram—me, Mrs. Alexander Thomson—a common street tram—to the railway. What would Mr. Thomson have said!—Ha-ha-ha! I wish he knew it, if only just to vex him."

Roderick sat down by his sister, grieved and sad. She was in such an excited

state that he did not attempt a single question, but she went on rapidly talking.

"What a hunt there'll be! Not that he cares for me, not two straws, but it isn't respectable to have one's wife running away. And they will think I have gone mad, and killed the baby—he knew I hated it. But I'm not mad, I am quite in my sober senses, Rody—Is that a noise? I told the girl to bolt the front door. Somebody might come after me, though I don't think it. And they never would imagine I had come here to you."

"No," said Roderick, with involuntary bitterness. "Nevertheless, I being still your brother, and you having chosen to take refuge with me, you are safe. Be satisfied."

He laid his hand on her shoulder—she was shaking from head to foot—then, untying her bonnet and cloak, he made her lean back in the arm-chair.

Tears started to Bella's eyes. "Thank you; you were always kind to me, Rody, and you have got used to women's ways, I see. But don't be uneasy, I shall not faint, I never do. I'm tough, like mamma, or I should have been killed long ago. He was such a brute—you've no idea. That is, when he was drunk. Sober, he is —well, only a fool! I must have been blind—many silly girls are"—passing her hand wearily over her eyes—"but oh, Rody, fancy, to wake up after a week or two and find yourself tied for life to a drunkard and a fool! A brute too, as I

say. Roderick"—clutching by the arm—"you, a man, with a wife of your own, and—yes, I guess—would you believe that the very day before that poor little wretch was born, he—he struck me?"

Roderick sprang to his feet.

"Don't get furious, you can do nothing. Nobody can. It's only drink. He's decent enough, just a fool at most, till he drinks. Then he's a devil; and I hate him as I hate the devil. It's right."

"Right or wrong, you must compose yourself," said the brother, himself making a violent effort at self-control. "My wife"—the instinctive appeal which had become habitual now—"my wife, come here."

Silence came, with the small bundle,

so piteously quiet, as if only half alive, in her arms. She had been going in and out of the room with it while they talked.

"Your bed is quite ready. Come, sister."

Bella, occupied with herself and her brother, had apparently forgotten her brother's wife. When she looked at Silence—the young mistress of the house, the woman with the womanly heart, which that forlorn babe seemed already to have found out, for it was fast asleep on her warm breast—this other woman, the miserable fine lady, the mother with the unmotherly soul, was struck with a mingled feeling, half surprise, half compunction.

"Yes, of course we are sisters. But I thought you would hate me—hate us all. It was Roderick I ran away to. I never thought of you."

"That was natural. But now, all that are his are mine—as is also quite natural. Come."

Bella grasped the offered hand and rose, saying, with a feeble laugh, "Rody, your wife must be an exceedingly good woman."

"*Cela va sans dire*, I hope," said he, trying to laugh, as he hurried them away upstairs, and sat down over the fire, thankful to be alone.

Most men dislike scenes, he more than most. The sight of his sister, the sound of her familiar voice, even down to the

old boyish pet name, which belonged exclusively to those early days—his wife had never used it—affected him deeply.

Then, too, he was a man, with all a man's feeling about marital rights and duties. To find himself sheltering a runaway wife, though even his own sister, was very distasteful. Still every brotherly and manly emotion blazed up into righteous indignation at thought of Bella's wrongs.

"To strike her—actually strike her! Poor, poor girl! If I had been at hand—if she had had a brother to stand up for her!" And again his tender conscience smote him, as if he had not done half enough, as if his passive acceptance of fate had been of itself an error.

Should he resist now? Seeing that his sister had come to him for refuge, should he not hide her—that was impossible, nor, had it been possible, would he have stooped to any concealment—but openly protect her, against her husband, her mother, and all the world?

His head drooped in his hands to "think it over." But he had grown unused to solitary thinking now. Wearily he looked round for the second self, always beside him, ready at least with the sympathy which is often as good as counsel, sometimes even better still.

It was almost an hour, quite the middle of the night, before Silence came in. She looked very pale and tired; but there was a deep joy in her face. With

her light curls drooping over her white dressing-gown, she stood beside him, a vision of peace.

"Dear, you put me in mind of one of Fra Angelico's angels."

"But I have been doing no angel's work, I have been washing baby. She looked so sweet, though she is so very, very small. Then I put her to bed beside her mother, who said she felt 'quite safe and comfortable.'"

"Poor Bella! And you—I fear you are terribly worn-out, my darling?"

"Oh! no, I like looking after people. And you—you are glad to have one of your 'ain folk' under your roof? Is it not strange, after our talk to-night?"

"Very strange. And," with a kind of

sad apology, "you will be good to her? You don't dislike her?"

"Dislike her?"

"No; there are likeable points about her, poor girl! And she has suffered so much! What shall we do with her? I have been wearying myself with thinking. Can she stay here?"

"Of course she can. We have contrived admirably; I rather like contriving. She brought no clothes for herself, but she did not forget her baby. She has a great bundle of all things needful. I do believe she cares for it after all. She laughed, actually laughed, when she saw it so happy in its bath, which was our wash-tub. Only think! neither she nor I had ever washed a baby before; we were

quite afraid; but Janet, who has had little brothers and sisters—six, I think—came to the rescue and helped us. Poor Janet, she was so proud!"

The simple, wholesome, domestic details—comedy neutralizing tragedy—Roderick laughed at them, and felt more comforted than he could tell. Then, turning to his wife, he pressed his lips on the small right hand, so soft, yet so busy and so strong.

"Coals of fire—coals of fire," he murmured, much moved.

Silence did not at first understand the allusion, then she said,

"Yes, coals which melt and purify all sterling ore; that was how my father always explained the text. And

who knows? she may be softened yet."

"My mother?"

"I have been hearing all about her, how good she is, how generous and warm-hearted. And she was always so proud of you. She thought you ought to marry a countess at least! and you married only me! It really was a little hard for her."

Roderick drew his wife down upon his knee—a "Fra Angelico," but a mortal woman still—and buried his head on her shoulder. He did not speak, or nothing that she could hear, but she felt his tears.

The said "coals of fire," when duly heaped up, warm others besides those they are meant to melt. Seldom had there

been a brighter breakfast-table than that in the little parlour at Blackhall; even though Bella kept it a long time waiting—"which must never happen again," said the young master to the mistress. But for once both forgave, and when Mrs. Alexander Thomson sailed in, her splendid clothes contrasting strangely with her piteously white face, knelt with her brother and his wife round the family hearth, and then took her seat at the simple family table, all the misery outside, the dreary past, the doubtful future, could not take away a certain sense of peace.

But the simple breakfast of porridge and tea, bread, butter, and eggs, which always satisfied Roderick, had, to confess the truth, its difficulties with the guest.

Despite her condescending smile, it was evidently not exactly what Mrs. Alexander Thomson was used to, and she felt that she was condescending. Also, after the first warm pleasure of meeting, both brother and sister became conscious of that curious sense of strangeness which, notwithstanding the closest tie of blood, rises up after a time between those whose lives have drifted wide apart, never to be united more. So much so that, by-and-by, conversation flagging, it was quite a relief to hear a feeble wail overhead.

"That's baby! What a bother she is! Could Janet go to her?"

"I will," said Silence, and vanished from the room.

"That wife of yours is the very kindest

of women, Rody; but I hope she will not over-fatigue herself," remarked Bella, politely, though making no effort to prevent the fatigue. She always had a trick of never doing for herself what another was willing to do for her. And as she sat in the arm-chair, her feet on the fender, she looked the very picture of luxurious ease, except for the haggard, restless look so sad to see.

"I must leave you," Roderick said. "You know, Bella, I am a working man now, and get my own living."

"Yes, she told me. It must be very disagreeable."

"On the contrary, I rather like it. Daily bread, honestly earned, is far sweeter than the old idleness."

"Is it? Then I wish I could earn mine."

"You have no need, having your own independent fortune."

"Yes; *he* can't get it, mercifully; mamma tied it up too safe. But neither can I, unless she chooses, and she will not choose. She will do nothing for me unless I stay with my husband, 'like a respectable woman,' as she says. I doubt if she will ever forgive my running away, even to my own brother."

"Who, I suppose, is not respectable," said Roderick, bitterly. "Nevertheless, she must be told. Shall I telegraph to her for you this morning?"

He spoke firmly, having already made up his mind to this: but he was not

prepared for the agony of terror and misery which came over the unfortunate wife.

"No, no, no! If you tell her, she'll tell my husband, and he will come and fetch me. Not that he cares for me—not a pin! but only for the sake of appearances. Oh! Rody, tell nobody! Keep me safe—hide me! If you only knew what I have suffered!"

"My poor Bell, my Heather Bell!" said he, tenderly, using the old pet name he had invented for her in the days when they played together "amang the broom." At that she quite broke down.

"Oh! I wish I were a girl again. I wish—I wish I had never married. Somebody once said to me that a woman has

always a future until she is married, then she has none. Tied and bound—tied and bound for ever. And I am but seven and twenty."

That look, half appeal, half despair, it went to Roderick's heart, for he knew it was only too true. She was "tied and bound" with the chains she had herself riveted. Even her own brother, however he pitied her, was powerless to set her free.

"Only seven and twenty," she repeated. "Such a long life before me. How am I to bear it? 'Till death us do part.' And I can't die. And he—he won't die; people of that sort never do."

"Hush!" said Roderick, turning away aghast. "You don't know what you are saying."

"I do know it, only too well. Many a time, when, after raving like a madman, he has sunk to a mere drunken dog, and lain asleep on his bed like a log of wood, I have thought of Jael and Sisera, or Judith and Holofernes, and others of those holy murderesses. If it would only 'please God to take him,' as our minister says. He would be much better in heaven. He couldn't get any drink there."

This ghastly mixture of the horrible and the ludicrous, added to what he knew of the utter recklessness of Bella's nature when roused, was almost too much for Roderick to bear. He looked instinctively round for the one who now was always at hand, helping him to bear everything; but Silence was still absent upstairs. Then,

laying a firm hand on the poor violent woman, at once violent and weak—it is so often thus—he placed her back in her chair.

"You are talking nonsense, Bella; you know you are; the most arrant nonsense, or worse. Don't be afraid, you have a brother still, who will do his best to take care of you; but you must let me do it in the right way. Nothing cowardly, nothing underhand. Your mother, at least, must be told where you are. My wife says so. She and I were talking it over this morning."

"Very kind!"

"It was kind, and wise, too," was the grave reply. "Silence is the wisest woman I know."

"And I the most foolish! It looks like it. Very well. Cast me off if you like. Turn me out of doors. I'll take the child and go."

But it was only an hysterical impulse, which ended in a flood of hysterical tears.

Utterly bewildered and perplexed, Roderick went to the foot of the stairs and called "Silence," in the sharpest tone he had used since his marriage.

"Why do you leave me? You know I can't do without you," he said. Then added, as she descended, with the wailing child still in her arms, "It is hard for you too, my wife. Our peaceful days are all done."

"Not quite," she said, smiling—it was

wonderful the sweetness of her smile whenever she had that baby in her arms—"I see," when she perceived Bella, and heard her frantic sobbing. "My friend" (the loving *mon ami* which she still used sometimes), "you are of no use here. Leave her to me—women understand women. She will be all right soon. Take your hat and go. Outside work is quite hard enough for you. Good-bye, my dearest—dearest!"

She lifted up her face to be kissed—the pale, firm, peaceful face, such a contrast to the other one—opened the door, shut it after him, and watched him safe away. Then, with a great sigh of relief, she went back to her unfortunate sister-in-law.

CHAPTER VI.

Shaming the Devil.

WHEN Roderick came home at night, not without a certain masculine apprehensiveness of domestic worry plainly written on his face, he found the household settled into surprising peace.

In the first place baby was not crying, but asleep, Janet's young sister being installed as temporary nursemaid, and a very clever one; and baby's mother, her grand silk dress replaced by a soft woollen

one of Silence's—the two women were nearly the same height—sat by the parlour fire. Idle certainly—Roderick remembered how Bella would sit for an hour at a time "toasting her toes," with her hands before her—but apparently quiet and content. He went up and kissed her with brotherly affection, saying something about his pleasure in having her in his house.

"Then you'll not send me back to mine? You did not telegraph to mamma as you said you would?"

"No."

"Nor write?"

"How could I write to my mother?" said Roderick, with a mixture of pride and sadness. "No; whatever is done, you

must do it, not I. We will talk of it after dinner." For he saw that Silence had given herself the unwonted trouble of late dinner, just to make Bella feel things "more like her own ways." It was a little matter, but it touched the young husband's heart. While he sat talking to his sister, his eyes were perpetually following the flitting figure of one who never sat still—never knew what idleness was till she had done everything for everybody.

"That wife of yours makes me so comfortable," said Bella, benignly. "And she is so clever, so inventive, really quite a treasure in a small household. In mine now, I never could do anything myself, as she does. It must be very pleasant."

"Only, perhaps, rather fatiguing. My wife, come here and rest, just for five minutes." And, as he kissed the tired face, he felt sure that the "comfort" which Bella so enjoyed had cost Silence something.

Dinner passed, and the half-hour afterwards, during which Roderick tried hard to admire his new niece, and to make things as easy and cheerful as possible with his sister.

When Silence—always Silence—had put baby to bed, the three gathered round the cosy fire, listening to the howl of the wind and the patter of the rain outside, which only made more peaceful the deep peace within.

"What a quiet, pleasant life you must

have here, you two!" said Bella, with a sigh.

They looked at one another and smiled.

"And are you so very poor? What do you live upon?"

"First, there is Blackhall. Then my wife has her income which Cousin Silence left her, and I earn mine. We put the two together—marriage should be a fair partnership."

"But it is not," broke in Bella; "it is mere slavery, unbearable slavery. Oh! that mine was ended! Oh! that I were free!"

Roderick took a hand of wife and sister.

"Let us have a little talk together, and face our position, which is not an easy

one. Bella, what do you mean to do?"

"I don't know."

"Then what do you wish me to do?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. But, oh! Rody, why bother me, when I am so comfortable?"

Just the old Bella—easy, pleasure-loving—dwelling only in the present moment, acting entirely on her impulses, of which both the good and the bad ones were equally shallow, equally transitory. There are many such women, who please a great many men—as she had done; who generally find some one or other to bear their burdens for them, and go through life, as she expressed it, quite "comfortably."

As Roderick looked from one to the other of the two beside him, he thought—

no, he loyally refused to think—but he instinctively clasped his wife's hand tighter in his own. Small as it was, and tender, that was the hand for a man to cling to, ay, and lean on—as, soon or late, men must lean on women, when trouble comes.

"Bella," he said, earnestly, "do you at all understand——"

"I understand that I am henceforth what is called a 'grass widow,'" interrupted she, with her reckless laugh. "Mamma must keep me, or give me my money and let me keep myself. My husband will never give me a halfpenny. And Silence says I ought not to ask him. She has the very oddest notions, that wife of yours."

Roderick pressed the hand he held.

"Have you two been talking together?"

"A little."

"And you have told her everything?"

"Everything—made a clean breast of it. A pretty story, isn't it, Silence? But it's at an end now, thank God!" said Bella, setting her teeth together. "Even a worm will turn at last."

"Shall you not go back to your husband? that is, if he will take you back."

"Trust him for that! He knows on which side his bread is buttered; all the Thomsons do. They were glad enough to catch me, a bright, clever, pretty girl—yes, I was both clever and pretty once, my

dear—to be a sort of care-taker or keeper over him; he needs a keeper when he is drunk. And a wife is the best sort of one —saves appearances. Thomsons as well as Jardines would do anything in the world to save appearances."

Roderick made no answer. He knew it was true. The sight of his sister had brought back the memory of many a boyish struggle, Quixotic as vain, against the predominant spirit of the family; a family in which the first question that arose was never "Is it right?" or "Is it wrong?" but only "Is it expedient?"

This law of expediency, not righteous prudence, but petty, worldly wisdom, had been at the root of Bella's marriage. Those who had had the making of it,

would they not on the same principle do their best to prevent its being unmade? He felt sure his mother would. Anything, everything, she would sacrifice rather than be "talked about;" as the world would talk, if there was a public separation between Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson; two people who, in their own opinion, and that of their respective families, held such a very important place in society.

He knew his mother and the rest would view this catastrophe, as they had viewed the marriage which resulted in it, solely from the stand-point of society. No higher law than what the world would think, and say, ever actuated or guided them. In old times, he had dimly guessed

this—secondarily, and chiefly by its effect on his silent, patient father; but now, when he himself had come to man's estate, and viewed things with his own eyes, he saw it clearly.

Still this affair was, as all such cases are, most complicated and difficult; and in it Roderick's own position was not the least painful. To act a brother's part towards his poor sister, he did not shrink from that; but to aid and abet a runaway wife in concealing herself from her husband was most galling, not only to his pride, but to his sense of honour. Yet, to thrust her from him into hopeless misery was worse than cruel, dangerous: knowing her temperament, which was to escape from present pain as foolishly as a child

does, at any future risk and cost. The medium course, to come boldly forward, and insist upon the separation she desired, was equally difficult and responsible for any brother, being himself a man and a husband.

Roderick looked at his own wife, growing closer to him every day, in the mutual dependence which so gently and naturally replaces passion, and gives to both that sense of ineffable rest, of unseparated joys, and divided cares.

"Bella," he said, in a moved voice, "do you know, my dear, exactly what you are doing, or wishing to do? Remember what your Bible says, 'What God hath joined, let no man put asunder.'"

"But God did not join us, it was the

devil, I think," she answered, with a bitter laugh. "And, if all other help fails, the devil shall help me to get rid of him."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind. Wait till I'm driven desperate. I am nearly, already. If only I could tear off this." She took hold of her marriage-ring and made as though she would throw it into the fire. "If at any price, at any cost, I could be Bella Jardine again, and never more set eyes upon that brute, that fool, that——"

"Hush!" said Silence. "He is baby's father."

"Ah, that's it—that's the misery. I don't hate my child. I did at first, but not now; it's nature, I suppose. Besides, she is my child, all I have of my own; and

even that is half his, if he chose to claim her. Oh, Rody, what must I do?—what can I do?"

It was, indeed, a piteous strait. The one false step, marriage unconsecrated by love, almost as great a sin as love unconsecrated by marriage, had brought its own punishment with it. The young pair, to whom these things appeared as a ghastly nightmare, scarcely comprehensible as a daylight reality, instinctively drew closer together, while they regarded the hapless woman, who had, as she truly said, no future. A loathing wife, an unthankful mother, what future could she have, either in herself or in "the world," for which she had sacrificed so much and gained so little?

What could she do? As she put the question, her despairing eyes supplied the answer. Nothing!

"I know very little about these things," said Roderick, sadly; "but I believe there are two ways of parting man and wife—by divorce, enabling both to marry again; and by judicial separation, which keeps them bound for life. But oh, the pain, the scandal! Think of your child; think, too, of your mother!"

While using this argument he knew its futility. Whether from disposition or circumstances, Bella had always been that rather rare character among women, a woman who thinks only of herself. With a perplexed longing for help, for counsel, her brother turned to the other woman beside him.

"What does my wife say?"

"I don't care what she says—what anybody says," cried Bella, violently. "I will get rid of my husband somehow. I have no love for him; I never had. It is a simple question of money. If I run away, how am I to keep myself and the child? She says—that voice of wisdom there—that, if I leave him, I ought not to accept a halfpenny from him. Very well, get mamma to maintain me, or else I'll maintain myself."

"How?"

"I don't know or care. It may not be for long. He will drink himself to death one of these days."

Roderick turned away in horror, but Silence laid a firm, stern hand on her sister-in-law's arm.

"One word more such as that, and we will neither of us help you."

Bella shrank into submission, even a little shame, then burst into piteous entreaties.

"Oh! Rody, do not be hard upon me! I have nobody in the world to come to but you. How am I to get rid of my husband? Not to harm him—I don't wish to harm him—only let me escape from him. I will do it, and I'm right; your wife says so."

Roderick started.

"Yes, she is quite right," said Silence, not lifting her eyes, but speaking, as her husband knew she could speak sometimes, with unmistakable decision.

"My wife is a daring woman to say such a thing."

"Am I?"

She looked up a minute with a quivering lip, and did not attempt to put back her hand, which he had let go; but folded her fingers together, after a way she had, as if to give herself strength, when she had any difficult or painful thing to do.

"This is very strange advice for my wife—I hope, a happy wife—to give to my sister. Your reasons?"

"They are not easy to explain, but I will try." She stopped, then, with a firm, clear voice, went on again. "If Bella had only herself to sacrifice she might do it, though I am not sure. It is a sin against heaven to condone sin, even in one's own husband. But, in this and similar cases,

a woman does not sacrifice herself alone. There are others upon whom the sins of the father may descend, generation after generation. She must think of them. She is responsible to God for them. If I were in Bella's place," her voice sank almost to a whisper—she turned deadly pale, and then flushed crimson all over her face—"if I were in your sister's place, I would die rather than be mother to a drunkard's children."

There was a total silence. Bella, accustomed to make self the stand-point of all her opinions and acts, perhaps could scarcely understand; but Roderick did. Startled he might be, yet there was something in his wife's stern righteousness which he could not gainsay. As he looked

on that small sweet face, so sweet, yet so strong, he saw in her, for the first time, not merely his wife, but the woman, the conjoint and yet separate existence, intrusted by God and nature with far more than her own petty life, inheriting—and conscious that she inherited—the destiny which came to her from sacred Eve, "mother of all living."

Man as he was, with a man's natural leaning to the masculine side, with a man's natural blindness to much that women see by instinct, still his wife's words smote him with a certain respect, even awe. That she had strength to say them at all, she so timid, so shy, so reticent, proved how deeply she must have thought and felt on the matter.

"Dear," he said, holding out his hand, "if all women were like you—especially if all sons had mothers like you—there would be fewer bad men in this world."

She answered nothing; but her whole face brightened in recognition of what is to women like her as sweet as being loved—honoured. And so, without more arguments, all three seemed tacitly to accept the position which poor Bella had so fiercely insisted upon, that, for her, married life—or rather that unholy travesty of marriage which had been her self-inflicted doom—was over and done for ever.

"Let her live as a widow," Silence said. "Her life is lost, I know that, but let the sacrifice end here. Let

her not submit to be the ruin of other lives."

"But she may be the ruin of her husband's, whom she took 'for better for worse.' How do you answer that?"

Silence shrank back, full of pain. "Oh, it is difficult, so difficult, to see the right; worse, perhaps, to do it. Still, still—No," and again the strong, clear Abdiel look came into her eyes. "No, there can be but one right and one wrong, alike for men and for women. When love is dead, and respect also, there comes a time when duty also ceases. She must leave him. Think, Roderick, if the case was reversed? Would you, or any other husband, keep as mistress of your house, as mother of your children, a drunken woman?"

"God forbid!"

"Then God forbid it to your sister, too. Drunkenness, dissoluteness, anything by which a man degrades himself and destroys his children, gives his wife the right to save them and herself from him, to cut him adrift, and be free. Poverty, contumely, loneliness, let her endure all. Pity her lot, if you will, but that she should ignore it, accept it, submit to it, above all, let the innocent suffer from it—never! Bella tells me that the law gives her possession of her child for seven years. My advice is, let her take it in her arms and fly—anywhere, so that her husband cannot get her back, or make the law follow her. Nay, if I were she, I would defy the law; I would hide myself at the world's end,

change my name, earn my bread as a common working woman, but I would save my child, and go."

As Silence stood, holding close to her breast the poor babe—she had fetched it, and was walking up and down the room with it, for no one else seemed to have patience with the miserable, sickly, wailing creature—she looked the very incarnation of womanhood in its highest form, motherhood; absolutely calm, absolutely fearless, as mothers ought to be.

Roderick, touched with many new thoughts, which come crowding to a man when he has ceased to be merely a young man, absorbed in himself alone, and begun to look into the far future, the future of those that may yet bless or curse him for

his part therein—Roderick caught her arm as she passed, and drew her to his side.

"Perhaps you are right—I do not quite know. We must take time to think. But just at this moment you must give baby to its own mother, and come and sit down by me. Remember, you are mine!"

"Yes."

She obeyed, apparently without a thought of disobeying, for the authority was that of love, and the voice, though decisive, was thrilled with unspeakable tenderness. "Mine!" Ay, she acknowledged the possession—the subjection. You could see by her look that she would have served him like a slave; but only because he was himself—her just and

righteous lord. Never for one moment would she have submitted to unrighteousness, or to tyranny.

"What a fierce little woman this is!" he whispered, with a smile. "I never could have believed it of her."

"Oh, forgive me! It is because I am so happy—so happy! that I can understand what it must be to be miserable."

But Bella's misery, however deeply it had moved her sister-in-law, did not seem to have overwhelmed herself. She began talking over all her affairs, volubly and freely; silent endurance was not her gift. Once having got her brother to agree with her in the opinion which, at any rate, she held to-day, though it might change to-

morrow, she became quite cheerful, and planned her future life as a "widow bewitched" with an eagerness that a little astonished Silence.

"If mamma would only give me some money, I could spend the summer in Switzerland — the winter in Paris. I always wanted to travel abroad for awhile; and to be travelling without him, able to go where I liked, and to do what I wanted—— Oh!"—a sigh of intense relief—"Rody, you must try to persuade mamma to give me plenty of money."

"You forget—" he began, gravely.

"Dear me, yes! I had forgotten all about it. But never mind, Rody dear," in a coaxing tone; "can't you put your

wrongs in your pocket and write to her for me? You always wrote such capital letters; and she would listen to you when she listened to nobody else. Her only son—worth all her daughters put together—at least, she thought so. Come—do it! This morning I objected to her being told where I was, but now I see it must be. You'll save me the trouble of it by writing to her yourself?"

Poor Bella! she was always ready to lay her burdens upon anybody who was willing to bear them. He knew that, and yet when he looked at her and heard her familiar caressing voice, the good brother felt again like the little boy who had carried his big sister's parcels, flowers,

garden-tools, even her doll sometimes, when she got tired of it.

"I cannot write to my mother," he said, with a sad earnestness, "but I will telegraph to her in your name, saying where you are, and that you wish to stay with me—you really do wish it?—till something can be settled between you and your husband. Reconciliation; or, if that cannot be, separation."

"Separation—only that—*she* says so," cried Bella, always ready (another peculiarity—how strangely, cruelly clear they all came out now!)—ready and eager to lay the responsibilty of her doings and opinions upon somebody else.

"What I say is," Silence answered, "that if your husband is as bad as you

aver, and if you have that hatred to him which you profess to have, there is no righteous course for you but separation. But you must not wander about the world as you propose. Live simply and quietly. Be a real mother, and take care of your child. You can never be quite desolate with a child."

Bella shrugged her shoulders.

"You have the most extraordinary ideas! But you are a good woman—a very good woman. I shall tell mamma so. It shall not be the worse for you to have been kind to me, my dear," she added, with a certain touch of feeling, and then plunged back into her own affairs, which absorbed her so entirely, and which she expected everyone else to be absorbed in too.

Far into the night they talked, for Mrs. Alexander Thomson, who never rose early, was accustomed to sit up late; and, besides, she seemed to take a certain satisfaction in discussing her misfortunes. It was like a person with an ugly wound, or a remarkably severe illness, who at last comes even to take a sort of pride in the same. The self-respect, reticence, and silence of a broken heart, were not hers at all, though unquestionably she had been a cruelly-wronged woman. Taking advantage of her folly, worldliness, and love of wealth and position, her husband's family had married him to her, just to shift from themselves the burden of him—a man who, as she truly said, "wanted a keeper" rather than a wife. She had

walked into the snare open-eyed, but it had been a snare nevertheless; and Roderick, as he heard her revelations, felt his blood boil with that righteous indignation, that instinctive chivalry in defence of the injured and the weak, which, if every strong man felt as he ought to feel, there would be no need for feeble women to vex the world with clamours about their rights or their wrongs. The truly noble of either sex never care to put forward either the one or the other.

While Bella talked, Roderick and his wife were almost entirely silent; and when, afterwards, day after day passed by, and no answer came to the telegram, or to a second, which, weary of waiting, she sent after it, still they made as few

comments as possible on what now began seriously to perplex them both.

Mrs. Thomson did not seem in the least perplexed. She made herself extremely comfortable, without much regarding the comfort of other people, exacted a great deal of attendance, and amused herself with suggesting many luxuries hitherto unknown at Blackhall.

"No, there's no fear of my husband's coming to fetch me," she said one day in answer to a question of Roderick's. "He is a Richerden man all over—hates the country—would never face a Highland pass in winter; and if he came he would run away again. You haven't big enough rooms, or grand enough dinners for him. By-the-by, Blackhall is a rather cold

house, Silence; and a little gloomy, you'll allow. You ought to keep up good fires; and, I think, if I were you, I would have entirely new curtains and carpets before next winter."

Silence smiled. It was one of the numerous little remarks which she had already learned quietly to smile at without showing offence, even if she felt any.

CHAPTER VII.

The Last Chance.

AS days sped on, the constant presence of an idle woman in a busy house, a luxurious woman in a not rich house, had, to say the least, its difficulties. The master of Blackhall did not feel them—his wife took care of that; but the mistress did. Many a time would Roderick notice how tired she looked; and why was it so? Had she not Bella to help her? women were always company

for one another at home while the men were away. His wife's only answer was that silent smile. The fact that her guest was his sister tied her tongue, even with her own husband.

"It is not for very long," she said every morning to herself, and went through the day's work as well as she could. At night she would often creep away, leaving the brother and sister together, and mount to the attic (which Bella had insisted should be made into a nursery, "because there one can't hear the little wretch crying") to sit with the child on her lap—the ugly, elfish, troublesome child, doomed to disease and weakness from its cradle—and wonder, with an agony of pity, how it would fight through life, or

whether, after all, God's mercy might not be best shown by taking it back again out of a world where nobody wanted it, and into which it had never asked to be born. A great mystery—which none can solve.

She and Bella were always friendly, even affectionate, in a sort of way; but, nevertheless, she often felt weary, so weary; like a person who had to speak all day long in a foreign tongue. At least, such was the moral effect of her sister's companionship. The two women might have been brought up in two hemispheres. Their views of life were so altogether different that they could not understand one another's language at all. Still this must be borne; and it

was borne. Things might have been a great deal worse.

Only when she heard her husband's restless call for her all over the house, and noticed a nervous irritation in him whenever he was left long alone with his sister, Silence began to wish for some sign of their suspense being over. Evidently, both mother and husband had discarded the runaway wife, either on her own account, or that of the brother with whom she had taken refuge.

"We row in the same boat now, Rody," Bella said one morning, when the seventh day's post had gone by. "I don't care; do you? Clearly you will have to adopt us as waifs and strays, both me and the child. I'll

call it after you, 'Roderica,' or perhaps 'Silence.'"

"No, not Silence," he answered, hastily. "I beg your pardon, but there can be only one Silence in the world for me," taking lovingly his wife's hand. "Advise with her, Bella; she will be sure to suggest the wisest and best thing."

But when the sisters-in-law talked things over, which they had full opportunity of doing, for a deep fall of Christmas snow shut them in, and made Blackhall impregnable, even to more courageous and less luxurious folk than Mr. Alexander Thomson, they came to no satisfactory conclusions. Though strong on the question of her wrongs, and her corresponding rights, Mrs. Thom-

son seemed to have a very feeble idea of her duties. To any course which involved the slightest trouble, or exertion, or self-denial, she always offered innumerable mild but insurmountable objections.

"It's all very fine to tell me that if I cut my husband adrift, and refuse to live with him, I can't expect him to maintain me, and must maintain myself—how can I maintain myself? It isn't genteel for women to work, and it isn't pleasant either. You talk of independence and all that, and the comfort my child will be to me; but I don't like children; and I'm sure, Silence, I shall never enjoy being poor. You know,"—she glanced round the old-fashioned room, and helped her-

self with an air of exemplary condescen-sion to the best dish of that meal which had been considered dinner, but which she always called lunch—"you, my dear, who have always been accustomed to that sort of thing, may find it easy, but I should not."

"No," said Silence, absently. She was thinking, not of herself, but of her husband—of his long hard-working days spent at the mill, amidst surroundings not too pleasant, and with the perpetual whirr of machinery in his ears; and to sensitive organizations incessant noise is of itself a torment almost indescribable, though unexplainable to those who do not understand this. He did, and felt it too, yet he never complained. Even now, as Silence watch-

ed him come up the brae, with somewhat lagging steps, she knew he would enter with a cheerful face, and, when he had "put off the mechanic and put on the gentleman," as he said laughing one day to Bella, be his own tender self to both of them. For the common notion, that a man may justifiably vent all his business worries on his womankind at home, did not seem as yet to have occurred to Roderick Jardine. Whatever vexed him out-of-doors, indoors he was always the kind, pleasant master and husband—always, under all circumstances, the gentleman.

"Yes, I like my work," he answered, when his sister inquired about it, which she rarely did, evidently considering it a

topic which had better be ignored. "And I like working. Once, Bell, I was a great idler; but *she* has cured me of that. If I had ten thousand a year even, I could never be idle any more."

Sitting down beside his wife, he leaned his head against her—a tired head it was: and laid on hers one of his brown hands, not such handsome hands as they used to be when they did nothing. She clasped it fondly, though she said not a word; she too was not given to complaining. Besides, hard as things were both for him and for her, to see him thus, doing cheerfully what he did not like (through all his tender fictions she knew he could not like the mill very much); fighting with hardships, submitting to poverty, and proudly

conquering any false shame about either; taking up his daily burden and carrying it, without a murmur or reproach—she felt—yes, amidst all her pain, she felt something as the mediæval women must have done—the noble ladies who buckled on their good knights' armour and sent them forth to battle—to live or die, as God willed, but never to be conquered, never ceasing to fight, like true knights, to their last breath.

But Bella could not understand this sort of thing at all. She shrugged her shoulders, and raised her brows.

"It's an odd taste, Rody, but you always were so odd. To be out at work all day, and come home, tired and dirty, hungry and cold, and then say you 'like'

it!—I wouldn't be you for the world, nor Silence neither—shut up in this lonely place all the year round. No wonder mamma would not come to Blackhall; it would never have suited her at all," and Bella laughed at the bare idea. "But I ought not to find fault with the poor old house, for I may have to come down to it after all. No telegram or letter?"

"Nothing."

"Well, don't look so grave about it. Plainly they have all cut me, left me to fall back upon you. Will you take me in, Rody? I'll sell my jewels—I brought a lot with me, you know—and pay you for my keep. When my money is all gone, you can turn me out to starve; only it wouldn't be creditable to either Thomsons

or Jardines if Mrs. Alexander Thomson and her baby had to starve."

"What nonsense you talk!" said Roderick, turning away, and changing the conversation at once.

But that night, when the household was all gone to bed, and they three sat over the fire, listening to the wind howling and the sleet pattering against the panes, he resumed the subject, and, somewhat to Silence's surprise, began, very tenderly, but with unmistakable decision, to arrange what his sister should do. His arrangement it was—not his wife's—as he plainly said, thereby taking from Silence the weight of a difficult and painful thing.

"I will not promise to keep you always, Bella, for I think husband and wife are

better left alone together; but we shall not turn you out, my poor girl, whatever comes," said he, laying a brotherly hand on Bella's shoulder. "The little we have —you see how little it is!—you shall share, till something can be arranged between you and your husband. Then, with what you have of your own—my mother will surely pay it over to you!—we will find you a home close by us. In the manse, perhaps, where I heard to-day there are two vacant rooms."

"What! to be shut up in a miserable country lodging, with only baby and nurse! Dreadful!"

"Not quite so dreadful as your other alternative—starving. And, Bella, we must look things in the face. If you have

no marriage settlement, and my mother keeps her money in her own hands during her lifetime, and both she and your husband cast you off, you have only your brother to fall back upon. I am not rich now, you know that; but you know, also, that, rich or poor, I should never let my sister 'starve!'"

"No, a thousand times, no!" cried Silence, taking her hand—for Bella, seeing this was no joking matter, had suddenly taken fright, and, as usual, burst into tears. "It may not come to that; but if it does, believe me, poverty is not so bad as it seems. You shall never want for love. You will live close beside us; our home will be open to you; and the child—the children" (in a timid whisper)

"shall grow up together. Oh! we shall be very happy, never fear."

"No, no; I should be miserable!" And she sobbed and moaned, and talked of "cruelty," "hard usage," wished she was "dead and out of the way;" the usual bitter outcries against fate of those who, having made their own fate what it is, have not the strength to bear it.

Deeply grieved, and not a little wounded, Roderick sat beside his sister, his wife not interfering—who could interfere?—till Bella's misery had a little subsided, and then said, quietly,

"Now, we will speak no more to-night; but to-morrow I will consult a lawyer and find out the right and wrong of the case, and your exact position with regard to your husband. Will that do?"

"No, no," she said. "Don't be in such a hurry. Wait till I make up my mind. It is so difficult to make up one's mind always. Money isn't everything, as Silence says, but I never had her enthusiasm for poverty. And the drink—which to her is such a horror—why, Alexander Thomson isn't the only drunkard in Scotland. Perhaps I might put up with him a little longer."

Both Roderick and his wife looked exceedingly surprised. They made no remark—they always had carefully avoided making any remarks to Bella about her husband. But when she was gone, and they stood alone together over the dying fire, they spoke of her with a pity deeper than either had ever yet expressed.

"Mark my words; she will go back to him yet. Do you think, my wife, she would be right or wrong?"

"Wrong!" was the answer, clear and firm.

"Why?"

"Because she will do it neither for love, nor duty, nor even pity, but only for expediency. Think! the horror of a married life, begun and continued for the sake of expediency!"

Silence looked up in her husband's face —her husband whom she was ready to live for, however hard a life, ready to die for, and he knew it.

"You are right," he said. "And yet both erred—both ought to suffer."

"But only they—not others. Not

innocent children. And, we know well, 'the sins of the parents shall be visited on the children even unto the third and fourth generation.'" She spoke in a low, solemn voice. "I told your sister once, and I shall tell her again if she asks me, that the woman who, being married to a bad man, makes him the father of child after child, is little better than those children's murderess."

"Poor Bella—poor Bella!" said the brother, mournfully, but he did not gainsay a single word.

CHAPTER VIII.

Heaven or Hell?

NOTWITHSTANDING her brother's compassion, Bella did not seem at all to deserve, or to desire, the epithet "poor." She appeared at breakfast next morning in the best of spirits, nor did she fall into her usual half-hour of despondency after the post went by. She watched the weather with a slight anxiety, but that was all. She even began to take an interest in Blackhall affairs, and especially in

an invitation for New Year's Eve at Symington, which her brother and sister were discussing together.

"Of course you will go, and take me with you? I had no idea, Silence, that you had such grand friends! Do you often see them?"

"Not very often. It is a good long way to walk, and besides——"

"Walk! You don't mean to say your husband lets you walk?"

A sharp quiver of pain passed over Roderick's face. "I let her, as I am obliged to let her do many things which cut me to the heart, but we bear them. Bella, when you and I were children, we had no need to think of money, now I have; very much need. If I hired a car-

riage and took my wife and you to Symington, it would cost me fifteen shillings, and my earnings are just two pounds a week. You perceive? Let us say no more."

They did not, for Bella afterwards owned to being "quite frightened" by her brother's manner; but several times that morning she fell into brown studies, as if something were secretly vexing her, and in the afternoon was suddenly missing for an hour, having gone herself—"for the good of her health," she said—to the village, and, as by mere chance they afterwards discovered, to the post-office.

Had she, after refusing so often, at last written to her mother? They did not like to ask, and she did not tell; but,

being not at all of a reticent nature, she soon betrayed that something was on her mind. For three days after that she was in a restless, slightly irritable condition, very difficult to please in trifles, and noticing more than ever, in that annoyingly condescending way she had, the weak points of the establishment.

"And so Cousin Silence left you the house just as it stands, my dear? as it must have been in papa's time, of course? Well, no wonder mamma did not care for it. Such poky rooms, such shabby old furniture! In your place I would have turned out every stick, and refurnished it in modern style from top to bottom. But you can do this by-and-by, if you stay here."

"I have no wish to go."

"Probably not, a quiet soul like you; it suits you exactly. But my brother, you surely would not keep him shut up all his days at Blackhall, he who would be an ornament in any society? Do think better of it. Poke him up, make him push himself forward in the world and get rich—there's nothing like money, after all. If mamma saw him well-off, so that he could come back to Richerden, and live in good Richerden style, such as we have all of us been brought up to, she might forgive him; who knows?"

"Who knows?" repeated Silence, assenting. She would have been amused, but for the sting which Bella's most good-natured words often carried—unintention-

ally;—it was simply that the woman could not understand.

"Just think of what I say," continued Mrs. Thomson, as she gazed lazily out of the window, down the winding glen, at the end of which curled upwards, in a fairy-like pillar, the smoke of the mill. "I wonder you can endure the sight of it —that horrid place where Rody works all day, Rody that used to be such a gentleman."

"He is a gentleman!" said the young wife, with a flash of the eye. "And I do not dislike—I like the mill. It has helped to make him what he is, and show him what he could do; and he does it, does it cheerfully, for me. Bella, if I die —and I may die, who can tell? this

spring"—with a sudden appeal in her eyes to this woman, so unlike herself, but yet a woman—"if I die, remember we were perfectly happy, my husband and I. We never have regretted anything, never shall regret anything, except perhaps that his mother—— I always feel so for mothers."

Her voice broke with emotion, but it was an emotion quite thrown away. Bella scarcely heard what her sister-in-law was saying. She sat listening, as she had listened a good many times the last few days, to any sound outside.

"Hark! What is that? Carriage-wheels?"

"Possibly. We do have visitors sometimes, even here," said Silence, with a smile.

But Bella heeded her not. She ran to the window and watched, in a tremor of anxiety, the arrival: a large, handsome carriage, with post-horses and postillion, and two liveried footmen behind, coming slowly up to the door.

"It is! it is our carriage! Perhaps she has come herself, poor dear mamma! I did not tell you, my dear, but I wrote to mamma and said, if she thought it best, I would come home. And I suppose she has sent for me. Look there!—look there! No, it is not mamma—oh, God help me! it is my husband."

Horror, disgust, despair, were written on every feature of her face, as she watched Mr. Alexander Thomson descend, leaning on his two footmen, and in a loud, imperi-

ous voice inquire, "if Mrs. Thomson were within?" How she shuddered, the miserable woman who had not had strength to free herself from her misery. But this was its last outcry. In another minute her worldly upbringing, her love of ease and luxury, and a certain pride to preserve appearances, asserted their sway.

"Yes, that is our carriage; isn't it a nice one? And he has brought it to fetch me. Well, he is not so bad, after all. I suppose he wants to get me back in time for the New Year—the Thomsons always have a grand family gathering at the New Year. They are a highly respectable family, and in an exceedingly good position, I assure you, my dear," added she, with a mixture of haughtiness

and deprecation, as if she thought her sister would blame her. But Silence merely said,

"Shall I go and receive your husband, or will you?"

"You! No! perhaps I had better do it myself. Send him in here; I'll manage my own affairs."

And she did manage them—how, was never accurately known. But half-an-hour afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson were seen sitting together on the drawing-room sofa, as comfortable as if they had never been separated.

And most likely half the world would say the wife was quite right in thus fulfilling to the letter her marriage-vow, condoning everything, shutting her eyes to

everything, making believe that wrong was right, and going back in the most respectable manner to her husband's house, there to sustain the character of a blameless British matron. She did it "for the best," as many women would argue, or "for the sake of the child," which is the argument of hundreds more who deliberately continue in wealthy dishonour; for what dishonour can be worse than marriage without respect and without love?

But, as the proverb says, Bella had "made her bed and must lie on it." Nobody had a right to interfere or advise. Silence never attempted to do either. She sat with the child on her lap, the poor, pitiful little creature whom she had

grown fond of and was almost sorry to lose, till she was sent for into the drawing-room, and then, to make things less difficult, she entered with baby in her arms.

Its father civilly noticed it and her, and there was a slight gleam of pleasure in his dull, fishy eyes, as if he were proud, after a fashion, of his good-looking, clever wife, and of his new paternal dignity.

"Nice little thing! And Mrs. Thomson tells me you have been so kind to it and to her, Mrs. Jardine. Accept my thanks, my very best thanks. It was quite a good idea of my wife's, this—this coming to you for change of air."

"Yes, Blackhall is an exceedingly healthy place," said Bella, with a laugh,

her old careless laugh. If there was a ring of mockery, even contempt in it, the man was too dull to find it out. He eyed her with extreme respect, nay, admiration, and put his arm round her waist with a pompous demonstrativeness, as if to prove to all the world what an exceedingly happy couple they were.

The tragedy had melted into genteel comedy, nay, almost into broad farce, were it not for the slender line that so often is drawn between the ludicrous and the ghastly.

"I suppose we had better leave at once. By changing horses, we shall post fast enough to reach home to-night, and go to your father's on New Year's Eve," said Bella, hurriedly. "So, my dear Silence,

we won't wait till my brother comes home. Mr. Thomson is decent enough now," she added, in a whisper, "but by-and-by, after dinner—I don't want Rody to see him after dinner. We shall post all the way," she said, aloud, "and by midnight we shall be at home."

"Where I hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Jardine," continued Mr. Thomson, with ponderous politeness. "Assure your husband that he will be always welcome at our place, and I'll give him the best glass of wine, or whisky if he likes it, to be found in all Scotland. And —and——"

"Come away, Silence. I'll get my things ready, and the child's, in ten minutes. Make haste!"

But even when the two sisters were alone together, both carefully avoided any confidential word. Bella made no explanation, and never named her husband but once, when Silence proposed to go down and give him some refreshment.

"Oh, he has taken care of himself already, trust him for that. He always takes care of himself. Why, my dear, if there is one creature in the world whom that man never forgets, it is Alexander Thomson."

No answer. None was possible. And Bella kept up her hard, gay, reckless manner, neither shedding a tear nor uttering one grateful or regretful word, all the time Silence was dressing baby. Only at the very last minute, when she saw its

aunt press a last tender kiss on the poor little pinched-up face, the woman in her could not help showing itself, even through the "grand air" which had now wholly returned to Mrs. Alexander Thomson.

"God bless you, and give you one of your own!" said she, pressing her sister's hand. "You have been very kind to me and mine, and always would have been; I know that. But it's better as it is. I couldn't stand poverty. I always did enjoy life, and I always must. He is in very good circumstances, and he promises me I shall have everything I can wish for. So good-bye, Silence; I suppose nobody is ever very happy, except you!"

Bella went downstairs, the other follow-

ing, and accepting mutely her voluminous public thanks for the "great kindness" she had received, and how she hoped to come again soon to Blackhall.

"And, my dear, mind you clear out by then all Cousin Silence's old sticks, and have the house thoroughly done up, modern fashion. There is a man at Richerden who will do it well; Rody knows him. By-the-by, tell Rody"—she turned a shade paler, and her lip quivered for a moment. "No; tell him nothing, he won't care! He will be only too glad to find his house empty, and have his wife all to himself—some husbands are. Come, Mr. Thomson"—she always called him Mr. Thomson—"if we don't make haste we shall be benighted, and you will have to dine in

some horrid roadside inn, which you know you couldn't stand upon any account. Good-bye, Silence; a thousand thanks, and a happy New Year! It's close at hand now. I suppose I shall dance the old year out and the new year in, as usual, at the Thomsons' house. Ta-ta! good-bye!"

She kissed her hand out of the carriage-window, and thus, in the most common-place and cheerful manner, departed with her husband, as if there had never come a cloud between them, and as if he were the best husband in the world. Not a poetical or dramatic *dénouement*, certainly, but scarcely unnatural—to her. She was one of those who have, and must have, their good things in this life. She found

them once more about her, and possibly they satisfied her; at any rate she could not do without them.

But young Mrs. Jardine, who had been poor all her days, and was a poor man's wife this day, with little prospect of ever being anything else, as she saw that splendid carriage drive away, felt almost as sad at heart as if she had been watching her sister-in-law's funeral.

CHAPTER IX.

A Good New Year.

WHEN Roderick found his sister had gone, gone without even waiting to say to him, "Good-bye, and thank you," he looked grieved, but neither surprised nor angry.

"We will not judge her," was all he said. "We ought not—we that are so happy."

"But there is something beyond both happiness and misery—the question of right and wrong."

"Nevertheless, I still say, 'Judge not that ye be not judged,' especially in a question of husband and wife. Each individual case has its different aspect, which no outsider can quite understand. My darling, let us say no more about it."

And she knew by his manner that he was determined to say no more about it; so, being a wise woman, she also held her tongue.

But all that evening they seemed to breathe more freely—certainly he did—thoroughly enjoying the empty house and the quiet fireside, where there was no need to make conversation; but the two sat together in the sweet unreserve and complete rest of married life, as free as being

alone, and yet without any of the dreariness of solitude.

"Nevertheless, I mean you to go out into 'the world' to-morrow night," said Silence. "Have you forgotten the dinner at Symington?"

This was the New Year's Eve party which they had discussed before Bella, and which Silence had urged him to accept, as it was half pleasure, half business. A certain "man of letters" (good old-fashioned words, and very appropriate in this case, as contradistinguished from "man of genius") who had talked much with Roderick at the first dinner, had been rash enough to express a wish to see the rejected novel—now lying, forlorn and dust-enshrouded, on the top shelf of

the old oaken press. Silence made her husband lift it down, and watched his eye brighten as he turned it over.

"'Nothing venture, nothing win,'" said she, as she re-arranged it tenderly, and tied it up afresh. "As you say in this very book, dear, 'Take the world at its best, and it will not give you its worst; believe in it, and it will believe in you.'"

"To convict me out of my own mouth, you traitor!" said he, laughing. He had been half inclined to hide his head at home, having grown very weary of late, in body and mind, but the light in his wife's eyes lit up his own courage once more—he consented to do as she wished. "But you, my darling?"

"I shall be glad to get rid of you—I have plenty to do at home."

"Only too much," said he, sighing. "Tell me honestly, was your visitor a trouble to you?"

"Yes; in some ways. But she could not help it, and I did not mind."

"Why did you not tell me?"

She smiled in his face, with that half playful, half tender, yet wholly determined look she had at times: "Roderick, if you think I shall inform you of all my little household affairs—you, a man, with quite enough cares of your own—you are greatly mistaken; I never shall. We will have fair division of labour: you the bread-winner, I the bread-dispenser. Did you not once tell me 'lady' was a Saxon word, and meant 'loaf-giver'? which implies that the wife should manage the house, and

take care of the money. I intend to do it. I can't do your work, but I should be ashamed of myself if I could not do my own, without laying the burden of it upon you, who are—slightly incapable."

Roderick laughed outright. "My queen!—as I used to call you—you are beginning to govern in good earnest! But your husband is not afraid."

"He need not be," she said, softly, taking his hand and kissing it. "He will always be stronger and wiser than I, in his own way. And now go to your grand dinner at Symington."

Though he had not liked going, when he really was there Roderick found he liked it very much. He had always been that best type of his sex—a man whom

men appreciated, even as the woman whom women are fond of is certainly the noblest kind of woman. And now that his fate was settled, his wife chosen, his home made, he took his place among men as a man and a citizen, ready to help on in the world's work, without doubts or drawbacks, and found his position both pleasant and honourable. Sure of it, and of himself, and finding himself among people who evidently neither knew nor cared how much he had a year, and whether he kept two servants or twenty, the young man's spirits rose, and he enjoyed himself heartily.

—So heartily that it was not until Lady Symington said something to him about a New Year's gift to his wife, that he

remembered what night it was, and how Silence was sitting alone at home. All the party were to wait up together, Scotch fashion, to see "the old year out and the new year in," but he hastily made his adieux, and walked off, rather vexed with himself, and yet not much, since he had good news to bring home. And he knew his wife was not one of those foolish women who exact endless outside observances; she was content to lie safe in his heart, knowing that she was as completely a part of himself as that true heart which went on silently beating, keeping fresh all the springs of life, whether he ever noticed it or not.

Walking rapidly through the star-lit night, strangely mild and still, as often

happens on New Year's Eve, just as though nature took a pleasure in this motionless watch over the old year that "lies a-dying," Roderick felt a softness almost like spring in the air. It seemed to stir all his young blood—he, with life all before him to will and to do. And some of the talk that night had given him a renewed impulse both as to will and deed.

"I must tell her at once. I know she will approve of it," said he to himself.

"It" was an idea started by the kindly "man of letters"—that, did Mr. Jardine's imaginative writing fail, there was a subject very popular just now, and likely to attract attention, which, with a little pains, he might examine, read up for, and

write about, so as to make an excellent quarterly article, sure of at least a moderate audience. The first step on the ladder which, if taken cautiously and firmly, might lead him either by literature or politics, or both, to the very top.

"'Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall.'

Only she will never say to me—

'If thy heart fail thee, do not climb at all.'

She would keep my heart up so that I could not fall. Bless her! I am sure of that."

So thinking, he came to his own door, stepping lightly across the grassy lawn, half in boyish mischief to look in at the parlour window—she liked to keep her

light visible—and see what his wife was doing now the household had all gone to bed.

She was sitting quietly and alone, having beside her a pretty box of sandal-wood, which looked like a present, for it had a Christmas card on the top. She was emptying it, layer after layer, and spreading its contents on her lap. Only little clothes—the "little clothes" that women and mothers think the prettiest in all the world. One after the other she unfolded them, putting her fingers through the tiny empty sleeves, looking at them admiringly, smilingly, and yet again with a strange sadness.

All at once Roderick called to mind what Lady Symington had said to him,

and her manner of saying it; he had been full of his own affairs just then, and not noticed much else—but now, as he slipped quietly indoors, and, kneeling down beside his wife, helped her to examine her New Year's gift—man as he was, it touched him deeply.

"And the little fellow only lived seven years, yet his mother has remembered him all this while. Poor Lady Symington!"

He said this with a curious awe, as with his slightly awkward fingers he helped his wife to re-fold the wonderful little garments, and replace them, as they had lain, untouched, for nearly forty years. Then they put the box away and sat down by the fire, hand-in-hand; and he told her of

all his new hopes, new ambitions—the life that somehow seemed opening before him, if only he had strength to carry it out.

"I shall do nothing rashly. 'Authorship,' they say, 'is a capital staff, but a very bad crutch.' I shall stick to the mill at present. But you were right to send me away to-night. It does me good to have something beyond the mill, to mix with men, and feel myself one of them, with life all before me, and power to do my work in it, with what poor old Tommy Moore calls, conceitedly,

> "'The mind that burns within me,
> And pure smiles from thee at home.'"

—That quiet Home smile, serene and pure,

it beamed upon him now, and his whole heart was satisfied.

"This is the first New Year we ever spent together, my wife. Shall we go outside and greet it in the open air, as is our Scotch fashion? My father always did so—and my mother too—my poor mother!" he sighed. "I wonder whether Bella's being with us will do good or harm—whether they will be thinking of me just now? We always had a grand family gathering at Hogmanay—my two elder sisters, their husbands and children. They never cared for me much; I was a mere boy when they married. Still, to have quite forsaken me! Well, well, I wish them all a happy new year—my 'ain folk,' as we say in Scotland."

Silence had no "ain folk"—only two far-away graves—but she had her husband. He and she walked up and down in front of the hall-door, talking of this and that, and especially of his work in the future, which seemed already to have taken a strong hold on his imagination, till in the dead stillness the distant stable-clock at Symington was heard beginning to strike twelve.

Until then there had not been a breath stirring, the night was so wonderfully calm and mild, and dusk rather than dark; the half-moon, slowly sloping westward behind the house, still showed faintly the belt of trees round the lawn, and even the dim outline of the distant hills. Above, the sky was *parsemé*—no English word ex-

presses it—with myriads of stars. When the last stroke of the clock ceased, there seemed to descend from it, right down from these mysterious stars, a sough of wind, equally mysterious. It rustled through the tree-tops, wandered round the house, and then passed away into stillness, almost like a living thing.

"Listen, listen, Roderick!"

"It is the sough of the air—the old year's last breath. I have often noticed it, and heard other people notice it too. And now—our New Year is begun. May it be a very happy one to you—to us—my darling!"

He kissed her, and then, seeing how mute and passive she was, made a little innocent joke about not being able to add

the usual Scotch wish of "a happy new year, and a man afore the end on't"—because she had already got her "man," and must make the best of him, bad as he was, to the end of the chapter.

"Which is such a long way off, my love. Quite alarming. Only to think that, thirty, forty, even fifty years hence, you and I may be standing—two old people, old and grey-headed—under these very stars. I remember looking up at them this time last year, and thinking of you, and wondering if we should ever be married."

"You were 'in love' with me then; you love me now. And you will love me even when I am 'old and grey-headed,' as you say. I shall love you, Roderick,

even when you are an elderly gentleman, and—not handsome at all! Nothing on earth could ever part us—nothing—nothing——"

"What is wrong, dear? Are you cold? We will go in."

"No—wait—just one minute."

He wrapped her closely in his plaid, and she nestled in his arms; but still kept gazing up, far up, into that mystic floor of heaven, which, though we see it every night of our lives, never loses its wonder, glory, and beauty.

"I should like to live to be an old woman—I should like us both to be old, and yet love one another as dearly as when we were young. It makes one feel immortal, this love: I should like, as you

say, fifty years hence, to stand with you under these stars—feeling that *nothing* could kill our love—or us. But, if things were to be different; if, this time next year, I am—not here, but away—beyond the stars!"

"What do you mean?"

She turned upon him those eyes of hers —"heavenly eyes," he had called them since the day he first saw them on the Terrasse at Berne.

"I may die this spring. Sometimes, you know, women do."

He shivered, but violently controlled himself.

"Yes, I know that; but—you are not afraid?"

"No, I am afraid of nothing—neither

life nor death—now. And I would have died, if I might have chosen—died gladly! to have been for this one year—this one happy year—my Roderick's wife, and his child's mother."

There was such a rapture in her face that whatever dread her words might have aroused in him sank down. It was one of those supreme moments when two who are wholly united, as these were, feel that no real parting is possible, that, "whatever happens" (as people say), they are one through all eternity.

"Hush!" Roderick said at last, in a broken voice. "God knows best. Let us leave it all to Him."

And then, taking her indoors, he declared that the first of January was no

time for moonlight rambles, and that he should abolish them altogether "till next summer."

"Next summer!" repeated Silence, faintly; and then added, "Yes, yes, I *will* leave it all."

CHAPTER IX.

The Year rolls on.

THE summer seemed a long way off —now; for, as is not unusual in the north—

> "As the days lengthened,
> So the cold strengthened,"

and a long frost and snow shut up Silence entirely within her own peaceful home. A dull time to most people: but nothing ever seemed to make her dull. Not even when, for some weeks after Bella's depart-

ure, her husband was restless and troubled, evidently expecting some news which never came. One formal letter of thanks, announcing her safe arrival, a month after date, but explaining nothing further, was all Mrs. Alexander Thomson vouchsafed to her brother and sister. She never mentioned her mother at all.

"Evidently Blackhall is tabooed," said he, with a bitter laugh. "Never mind, my darling. Let us give it up, and not vex ourselves about the inevitable."

And by that she knew how, until this moment, he had not given it up: had never ceased to hope and crave for something—the one blessing which no man gets twice in a lifetime. He may have as

many wives and children as fate allows; he never can have two mothers.

But—and some mothers would do well to remember this—when a man has his wife and his home, his interests and his work, he does not mourn eternally; as Roderick said, he "accepts the inevitable," and turns his mind to other things. Though the young Jardines had a shut-up and rather lonely life, it was anything but an idle one. The MS. novel came back once more;—alas! historical novels always do come back now-a-days—but the "solid" article did not, until it had become transmuted into a bundle of those delightful proof-sheets which raise into the seventh heaven of happiness young authors, and which even old authors can

hardly see without a certain thrill of pleasure, a faint reflection of the time when, as now with Roderick—

> "The world was all before them, which to choose;
> Reason their guard, and Providence their guide."

And both reason and Providence seemed to have taken in charge this young author. Roderick had "no nonsense about him." He did not start in literature with a picturesque and imaginative view of his own deservings, and how they were to be appreciated; he worked heartily at whatever came to his hand to do, and consequently he did good work. It might not have been the highest work, or the utmost he was capable of doing—Silence often thought so. But she copied his MSS., taught herself to criticize them fairly, to

see all the faults she could, "in order to prevent the world from seeing them," as she one day said.

"You see, dear, if you had to be killed, I would much rather kill you myself than let another person do it."

At which he laughed heartily, and submitted to all fault-finding and subsequent correction with the best grace in the world.

"Who knows! Such a severe domestic critic ought to make me a celebrated author in no time. I think I will begin another *magnum opus*—not a novel, though; and by working at all leisure moments I may finish it before the year is out."

"Before the year is out," repeated

Silence, softly. "Yes, yes; but will you not begin it now?"

And she not only got him to begin it, but she kept him steadily at it, she herself copying in the mornings what he wrote overnight, and arranging all that he had to "read up," according to his literary friend's orders, so as to give him the least trouble possible. It was hard work, but the mill-work happened to be slack just then; and Mr. Black was very kind and friendly —touchingly so. And thus, from day to day, Roderick's time was kept full, and his mind also.

He never spoke of his mother at all now; yet he was neither dull nor melancholy. It is a remarkable fact, which people who desire to punish other people,

deservedly or undeservedly, would do well to remember, that the sharpest pain cannot last for ever, and that a young couple, thoroughly happy in each other, will remain happy in spite of all their affectionate relatives, who think they ought to be miserable. Ay, and in spite of many outside things, that might have been hard in later years; but youth is the time to fight with fate—youth, with its infinite courage, its eternal hope.

Working at the mill all day, writing his book at night, with little society, for the Symingtons had gone into Edinburgh, with no relaxation except the daily walk "between the lights," which his wife insisted upon, Roderick had yet, he declared, never spent a happier three months. And

he looked so well too, for it is not work that kills, but "worry;" foolish ambitions, unsatisfied cravings, jarring tempers, stinging remorse, or unrepented sin. Not mere sorrow—that can be borne. Both of these had known sorrow—she especially—but there was a holy serenity in her face now, even when one day she spoke of that grave at Neuchâtel.

"Sophie Reynier sent me these violets from it. She says they are having such a lovely spring. And so are we. Just look at those primroses, and the daffodils, all in bud already. And only listen, Roderick, how that mavis is singing!"

They were walking up and down the sheltered kitchen-garden—lovely, though

it was a kitchen-garden, with its walks all bordered by flowers, sweet old-fashioned perennials, which sprang up year by year, not disdaining the neighbourhood of the vegetables, but growing together, each after its kind, in happy union. "Like you and your poor folk," Roderick once said, noticing how everybody loved her, and did her honour; maid-servants, mill-girls, all the people about the place. "They are so kind! I have such a happy life!" was all the young mistress answered. And her fair pale face bent down over her flowers, and up again to her budding apple-blossoms, and her tall forest trees, now growing full of nest-building birds.

"That mavis, I have watched him this

week past. I am sure he has a young family somewhere near. And he sings—how he does sing! in the top of that sycamore. He began the very day they planted out the hyacinths in my garden under my window."

This, too, was a labour of love, arranged surreptitiously between Mr. Black and his old gardener—a little mathematical diagram of beds, with grass lawn between, in which had sprung up, as if by magic, successions of spring flowers, snow drops, crocuses, hepaticas. Now, April being come, even in the dour Scotch climate, the sunshine was strengthening, and the garden brightening, every week.

"I shall have a quite beautiful nosegay

presently," she said; "just in time for my wedding-day."

He had almost forgotten it—the villain! He could hardly believe he had been married a year. And yet it felt sometimes as if they had been married all their lives, so completely had they grown into one another. It was only by an effort that either could recall their old selves, in the days when they were apart.

"That sunset" (they were watching it from a favourite seat she had—a summer-house, warm and dry, facing the south-west, and looking down the winding glen, towards the mill which, hidden by trees, only presented a few chimney-tops, and that fairy-like column of white smoke, unobjectionable to even the most æsthetic

eyes)—"that sunset," she said, "it makes the whole sky 'colorisé,' as we used to say in Switzerland. Do you remember the Jungfrau and the Silberhorn that day at Berne? and the Alpes Bernoises from Lausanne? O my dear land! it is a heavenly land! I can never forget it. But this is my home."

She had been speaking French—for a wonder; they had dropped almost entirely into English now, even when together, but she said "home"—that one dear word which we Britons specially have—with an intonation inexpressible, unmistakable. All her heart had settled into her husband's country. "Thy people shall be my people; and thy God my God."

Never—though Roderick Jardine may

live to see thousands of sunsets, will he forget this one, or his wife's face as she looked at it, watching it till the very last glow had died away. Then she rose.

"Now let us go in, dear."

"Are you tired?"

"I think so."

Leaning heavily on his arm, she went indoors; but she sat up sewing till her usual time, and rose as usual when, at a specially early hour—for he happened to have a long and busy day before him—he went off to the mill.

He was sitting in his little dingy office there, quite late in the afternoon, for he had some difficult accounts to make up, which he hated, poor fellow! not having

been blessed by nature with a talent for arithmetic; but it was Roderick's peculiarity that what he did worst he always worked hardest at, and what he particularly hated he always forced himself to do at once. His head swam, and his eyes were dazed, yet still he stuck bravely to those mountains of figures, Alp after Alp arising before his troubled brain, when he was startled by a little knock, and old Black, who he thought had gone home two hours ago, presented himself with a beaming countenance.

"Busy? Ye're always busy! And so I thought, sir, I'd just come mysel' and be the first to give ye the good news. Laddie, laddie," with a slap on the back which contrasted oddly with the usual respectful

"sir." "Go your ways, man, and thank the Lord for all His mercies. Your wife's doing well; and ye've got a bairn."

"My wife!" Roderick sprang up like a shot.

"Ou, ay, she's fine; and it's a lad-bairn. She bade Janet come and tell ye. She wadna ha'e ye fashed about it till all was over. My certie! but she's a brave woman—a woman in a thousand, is young Mrs. Jardine."

The old fellow drew out his snuff-box, took several pinches, and blew his nose with great violence, deliberately turning his back upon the young man, as perhaps was best.

"Thank God!" Roderick said at last, quietly and gravely. "Have I a son or a

daughter? I forget. I did not quite hear."

"A son, sir. Another Jardine of Blackhall. They tell me—I've been up at the house mysel'—that he's such a grand bairn, and his mother is gey proud of him."

"His mother—my son—how strange it sounds!"

Roderick put his hand over his eyes, vainly trying to realize that great change in a young man's life, when he has actually "given hostages to fortune," and sees himself not merely as himself, but as the father of a race to come, who will carry down his name, laden with curses or blessings, to remote posterity. A certain momentary terror—or less terror than awe—came

over him. Then, as if accepting the responsibility which no good man need fear, and which most men in their secret hearts are rather proud of, he shook hands with Mr. Black, put his account-books aside—luckily they were nearly finished—and prepared to go home at once.

It was a wet night, had been pelting with rain all day; truly the small Jardine of Blackhall got but a weeping welcome into this "wearifu' warld." But the young father never noticed the rain. He was fully and overpoweringly happy. The fear which half unconsciously had hung over him like a cloud for weeks, was now all changed into delicious hope and joy.

Bidding a cheery good night to Mr. Black ("By-the-by, I had a line from your

wife yesterday, but that's no matter now," said he as they parted), Roderick walked rapidly up the brae—the familiar walk, with the light in the parlour window shining ahead all the way. It was dark now, but there was a faint glimmer from the room upstairs, his wife's room. His heart swelled almost to bursting as he looked at it.

"My son, our son! Another Henry Jardine. If my father had only known! And my mother, shall I write to my mother? Perhaps? No!"

Choking down the pain that would rise, turning resolutely from the ever-lurking shadow which no sunshine of joy could quite banish, the young man passed through the dark garden to the hall door.

Faithful Janet was there to open it; only she. All was safe now, but it had been an anxious day. The house felt quiet—painfully quiet, its master thought, as he went into the empty parlour. They would not let him speak to his wife, but only look at her as she lay asleep, like a marble image. Her eyes were closed, but a sweet smile flitted about her mouth; and her left hand was extended outside the coverlet, over a small heap, a little helpless something. What a slender soft hand it seemed, with the wedding-ring shining upon it; and yet how strong it was!—strong and tender—essentially a mother's hand.

The young husband's eyes were dim, but he had self-control enough to obey

orders and keep quietly downstairs, not even asking to see his little son; in truth, just then he hardly thought of him at all as a human entity, but only of the mother, the precious life imperilled, and saved. And he had known nothing—nothing, all these hours. With what silent courage had she sent him away at breakfast-time, and kept him ignorantly content at his work, all that long day—that terrible day!

"Just like her. She never thinks of herself—but of me. My darling—my only darling!"

By-and-by she awoke, and he was allowed to kiss her, without speaking; indeed, she made no attempt to speak, only smiled—her own ineffably peaceful smile.

Then he settled himself in the parlour, which looked frightfully empty—all the more so that many of her things were lying about—her garden shawl and hat, which she had taken off when she came in the evening before; her work-box, her desk—carefully left open, with a little heap of addressed envelopes placed on the top of it, so as to save him all possible trouble. There were even the foreign stamps ready affixed to the Neuchâtel letters. No one at home had been forgotten; neither Mrs. Grierson, nor Lady Symington—not even Mrs. Alexander Thomson. At which Roderick again muttered, "Just like her." But there was no letter—how could there be?—addressed to Mrs. Jardine.

"Best not," he said, with a thrill of anger, the sharpest he had ever yet felt; "we bore all our sorrows alone—we will not make her a sharer in our joy. It is nothing to her; and she is nothing to us now."

But, even while he said it, Roderick's heart melted. It seemed as if, now he was a father himself, he felt all the more yearning towards his mother—the mother who bore him. Nothing could alter that fact.

With a great sigh, he sat down to his solitary supper, and prepared for an equally solitary evening.

CHAPTER XI.

Thy will be done.

HALF the night Roderick sat up, for he could not sleep, and busied himself with writing letters—in French or English—to those whom his wife loved, and who loved her, and would sympathise with her to the uttermost, he knew. Faithfully he fulfilled all her wishes—even writing a line to his sister Bella. But this, unlike the others, was brief and cold. As he did it, hot indignation, righteous

indignation, flamed up in the young man's heart—he would not have been a true man else; a wrathful sense of all his darling had been made to endure—his innocent darling, whom his mother had never known, nor taken any pains to know—and whom his sisters, following her lead, had as completely ignored as if she were no wife at all. But the storm did not last long, he was of too gentle a nature; and then he was so happy, so very happy. From his calm height of content that night, he felt as if he could afford to look with placable and even compassionate eye on his whole family—on the whole world.

Until near morning he sat writing; and then, finding that all was well in the silent room upstairs, he went to bed, just look-

ing out first upon the dim dawn—only one long yellow streak in the horizon—and thinking, if to-morrow happened to be a fine day, how pleasant all would be in his wife's room, where the sun shone almost all day long; how the hyacinths would send up their fragrant breath from the garden below, and the mavis, her own particular mavis, would sing his incessant song "from morn till dewy eve," over his busy mate and newly-hatched young. All the world seemed full of life, and joy, and hope. He had to cover his ears ere he could get to sleep, for the birds were already awake and singing so loud.

An hour or two's rest, and Roderick was up again—half dizzy with his unbelievable new joy, and trying hard to talk

business with Mr. Black, who had come to Blackhall himself to get the earliest news, and persuade the young father to escape from the ignominious position of total neglect which befalls all fathers under these happy circumstances, and take refuge in "bachelors' hall." Directly after, there drove up the Symington carriage, with Lady Symington in it, who straightway disappeared upstairs.

When she came down, her round, rosy face was pale, and her manner painfully quiet. She offered no congratulations, but laid her hand on Roderick's arm.

"I have been up seeing your wife. Have you seen her this morning?"

"Not yet. They would not let me."

"Quite right. Stop! You must not

go to her just now. Instead, take my carriage and fetch Dr. ——."

Roderick in his turn became ghastly pale—for this doctor was the most noted man in all the country-side, and he lived twelve miles off.

"Is there, then, such vital necessity? Is she in danger? Why did they not tell me? Oh, my God! my God!"

"Hush! we must not waste time in talking. It may be nothing, my dear"—the old lady's soft "my dear" was more terrifying than aught else,—"but we never know. The horses are fresh—they will go there and back without stopping. Bring the doctor with you—don't come without him. I will stay here till you return."

She spoke briefly, almost sharply, but with the calm decision that re-assures even while it alarms.

Without a word Roderick obeyed; allowed Mr. Black, who had listened in silence, to give him his hat and coat, and throw a plaid into the carriage after him.

"Will you not go too, Mr. Black? You had better. He is quite stunned, you see."

"Yes, my lady; but I know him—he's a brave lad, he will bear up alone. And I must go elsewhere."

The old man grasped the young man's hand with a sudden "God bless you!"—then Roderick sprang into the carriage and drove away.

Oh, that awful drive! sitting like a stone, watching mechanically the trees and moors and hills slip by—his watch in one hand, counting the half-hours—no, the very minutes, as they crawled along; in the other hand clutching Lady Symington's note, ready to be given to the doctor as soon as he could be found.

And then the drive back, with the "celebrated" man—to whom "the case" was only a case, and who talked cleverly and cheerfully and indifferently of that and many other things, till he saw he was scarcely heard, and then, with a natural human sympathy for the white set face beside him, dropped into silence and a book:—for years Roderick never saw the title of that book without a shudder.

A "ray of hope" he learnt there was. Only a ray! and three hours before the whole world had seemed to him to be flooded with sunshine. He asked no questions—made no remarks. Mute and unappealing he sat, half-stunned, half-blind, like a man who has suddenly received sentence of death—death utterly undeserved and unexpected—death in the very midst of life, so that reason refuses to take it in as a reality, and the mind is conscious of neither terror nor pain, only a dull sense of something having happened, or being about to happen, which one can no more escape than one can escape from the falling rock or the advancing breaker, both of which will bring certain and instantaneous doom.

They reached Blackhall, and he heard at the front door the doctor's question, "Is she alive?" and Lady Symington's affirmative answer; then he staggered in, and Janet had to fetch her master a glass of water, and put him into the arm-chair, quite dizzy and blind.

But he soon recovered himself, and went back to listen at the foot of the staircase.

"It will be a hard fight—a hand-to-hand fight—but we'll beat, I trust," the doctor was saying, with a thoroughly professional look on his clever face, and a gleam of his keen eyes, often seen in men like him, when they brace up all their skill to do battle with the great enemy. Then he and Lady Symington both

vanished, and Roderick was left alone.

Hour after hour he sat—no one coming near him. Once Janet knocked at the parlour-door, and asked if she might bring in baby, whose crying disturbed the mother. Roderick assented, but took no notice of his son; indeed, at the moment, he almost felt as if he hated him. Kind Janet was the only person who paid the least attention to the young heir of Blackhall.

Never, never will little Henry's father forget that day—a lovely April day, half storm, half sunshine, towards evening wholly sunshine. But Roderick turned from it and hid his eyes. And that mad bird, that loud-voiced mavis, singing incessantly in the sycamore-tree—he covered

his ears to deaden the sound. All the sound he cared to hear—and his very soul seemed concentrated in listening—was the moving of feet in that room upstairs, where the terrible battle for life was going on, and during which he seemed himself to be dying a hundred deaths.

He did nothing, absolutely nothing, hour after hour—what was there for him to do? Once, catching sight of the pile of letters—those happy letters, which nobody had thought of posting—he rose mechanically, in order to put them away somewhere, and looking about found his wife's work-basket, just as she had left it, the needle still sticking in the unfinished frill. Would it ever be finished? With a gasp, and a wild stare round, as if to call to

her—to appeal to her—she, who had never before forsaken him thus, been missing when he wanted her, or silent when he called—he seized and kissed it. Then he put everything in its place again, including her garden-shawl, which he folded up with his helpless hands, as tenderly as if it had been a living thing, and sat down again in the same chair, with his head dropped on his hands.

Presently, he had to rouse himself and speak a few common-place words to Sir John, who came to fetch Lady Symington home to dinner: people must dine—and the dear old lady looked quite exhausted. She went up to Roderick and kissed him—bade him hope still—while there was life there was hope; but nevertheless

urged upon him that last solemn prayer, which often seems to bring back the very blessing it resigns—"Thy will be done."

"I can't say it—I can't!" he answered—the young man to whom anguish—such anguish as this—was utterly unknown. But after she had left, promising to come again before midnight, he fell down on his knees, and in an agony such as he had not believed any man could pass through and live—he said it.

After that he seemed to grow quieter, and ready to accept everything.

By-and-by the doctor came down to him for a minute, with an anxious face but a cheery voice.

"Take heart, my dear fellow. As I said, while there's life there's hope. Do

not go near her—quite useless, as she knows nobody. By-and-by I'll fetch you, should there come a change."

"A change? For the better?"

"Yes. Or what they call a lightening before death."

Death—and her! The two ideas seemed impossible—irreconcilable. Shuddering, Roderick turned away from the old man, who did not mean to be cruel, who even put his hand kindly on the young fellow's shoulder and again bade him "keep up," that all was being done which could be done, that he had seen many a worse case; and so on, and so on. But Roderick heard it all as one in a dream, and directly afterwards, hearing the sound of a carriage, and believing it was only

old Black — faithful old Black! — who always meant well, but the sight of whom would almost madden him just then, he bolted out of the low window, and went and hid himself in the darkest depths of the glen.

When he ventured back into the house, the fire had died out—only a solitary candle was left burning on the table. He stole upstairs, and listened at his wife's door. All was quiet. There was not even the sound of the doctor's quick, resolute voice: he must have gone away.

Then all hope died out of Roderick's heart. Groping his way back to the parlour, he sat down in his old seat, waiting in a sort of stupefaction for the

final blow, and repeating to himself over and over again a line which seemed persistently to "beat time to nothing" in his overstrained brain—Othello's piteous moan—

"My wife? What wife? O God! I have no wife!"

Perhaps even now he, too, had no wife. All the sweet days were over, her brief happiness was ended, her young life done. And he?

Such a loss is a common story. Many a young man had lived through it—lived long after it—perhaps won another wife, and had many other children, and been very happy apparently; but I question if ever he is quite the man he was before, and I think he would hardly be a true

man if some little bit of his heart was not for ever buried in his dead wife's grave.

The candle burnt itself out, and the moonlight, creeping in between the undrawn curtain, was beginning to fill the room with a pale, ghostly light, when Roderick heard the door open, and some one enter very gently and hesitatingly.

"Well?" he said, not lifting his head—not doubting it was the summons of doom.

No answer; but the intruder came close to him—touched him.

"Who's that?" he said, almost fiercely; "who's that?"

"It's me, Rody: it's your mother."

"Oh, mother, mother!"

For one moment her arms were round his neck and his head on her shoulder. Then he thrust her violently away.

"I don't want my mother; I want my wife! What of my wife! Is she alive?"

"Yes. And she will live. And I thought I'd be the first to come and tell you. Do you hear, Rody? she's safe—quite safe. Both doctors say so. Thank God! thank God! Oh, Rody, my son, my son!"

Once more she opened to him those fond mother-arms which no man can resist —no man ought to resist, and let him sob his heart out there, patting him, kissing him, treating him almost as if he had been a little child, and sobbing herself the

while, with undisguised, uncontrollable emotion.

"How did you come, mother? Since when have you been here?"

"Ever so long, my dear."

"I was never told."

"No; I went up straight to her. It did not harm her, she knew nobody. The doctor is a friend of mine, he let me be with her. He knew I understood. I nearly died myself when you were born. Oh, Rody, what you must have suffered this day! Let me look at you, my boy—my dearest boy!"

It was a sorrowful gaze for both mother and son. Gradually Roderick's manner hardened, and he loosed himself from her clinging hands.

"Never mind me, it is my wife we must think about. I beg your pardon, mother, but I must go and see her, my wife whom you hate, whom you were so cruel to. But I love her. She is more to me than anything or anybody in this world. I don't know why you come here. I never asked you to come. Still I thank you for coming. But there is not the least occasion for you to stay."

He rose up, with his cold, proud manner, so like his father's. His mother, half frightened, as if she thought he hardly knew what he was about—perhaps he did not, poor fellow!—stood before him, silently wringing her hands.

"I repeat—there is no need for you to trouble yourself about us in any way. If

my wife lives, and you say she will live, she and I are quite sufficient to one another. Will you sit down? Can I get you anything? Or shall I order a carriage that you may go home at once?"

"Oh, Rody—Rody! Me—your mother."

She burst into tears, such tears as it is terrible to see an old woman shed.

And Mrs. Jardine was an old woman now. The struggle between her heart—and it was a good honest heart after all—and her fierce indomitable will, had told upon her severely. Could her son have seen her face he might have traced there the wrinkles of many added years. As it was he felt that the hand which grasped him shook as with palsy.

"Rody, I wish just to say one word."

Could a son expect his mother to beg his pardon? Would he not have been an unworthy son to have let her do any such thing? Was it not far better, for him, under the circumstances—under any circumstances—to have done—just what he did?

He dropped on his knees beside her, and laid his head in her lap, exactly as when he was her little boy.

"Mother, mother, forgive me! Let us forgive one another."

"Oh, yes—yes! Come back to me, my son—my only son!"

There was no other apology or explanation than this, neither now, nor at any future time, between them. Both avoided

it, and so best. It is always safer not to touch a half-healed wound. Besides, we are none of us perfect, God knows; and some of us see our faults all the plainer when no one points them out, but they are left entirely between ourselves and Him.

"And now," said Roderick, anxiously, "tell me about my wife!"

"Poor lamb—poor lamb! I have been with her these two hours. She thought it was her own mother, for she spoke a few words in French and called me 'mamma.' Tell her, Rody, that——"

Mrs. Jardine turned away, and again burst into honest, irrepressible tears.

"But still, mother, how did you come—how did you hear?"

She could not speak, but she put into his hand a little note, dated two days before, written in pencil, and in a hand very feeble, very shaky, but neat and clear.

"DEAR MR. BLACK,

"If you should hear I am likely to die, will you go at once to Richerden and fetch Mrs. Jardine? You know her. No one will comfort my husband like his mother.

"Yours truly,

"SILENCE JARDINE."

"And now," said Mrs. Jardine, smiling through her tears, the brightest, sweetest smile, Roderick thought, that he had ever seen on her face, "go you to your wife,

and let me go to my grandson. My son will not now want his mother to comfort him—thank the Lord !"

CHAPTER XII.

Is it the End?

A WARM, honest heart and a generous nature will cover a multitude of sins—or let us say errors—especially in a grandmamma. Over that baby's cradle the hearts of the two women, young Mrs. Jardine and old Mrs. Jardine, soon came to meet in the most wonderful way; as they met, too, over another thing, or rather person—often an endless "bone of contention", between mother-in-law and

daughter-in-law when they happen to be weak, selfish, or jealous women, which these were not—the man whom each loved best of all the world.

Roderick's wife and mother, however opposite their characters, had certain points in common, out of which grew an unmistakeable sympathy—namely, strength of will and thoroughness of purpose, great sincerity and affectionateness, the power of self-devotion, and an entire absence of that petty egotism which is always on the watch to guard its own rights, and has no vision for anybody's rights except its own. Besides, meeting her son afresh, as it were, with that great gulf of sorrow between, which had sorely changed both him and her, and, finding

him now a man—a husband and a father—in many ways very different from the "boy" she had been accustomed to think him, Mrs. Jardine had the sense to accept her position and make the best of it.

For her son's wife—the "poor lamb," as she had called her, and whom, as Roderick afterwards found out, her good sense, firmness, and devoted care, coming in at the last ebb of hope, had greatly contributed to save from death—Mrs. Jardine took to loving her, as strong natures are prone to love those whom they have saved, and who depend upon them, as for many days Silence had to depend upon her practical and sensible mother-in-law, in that total, sweet helplessness which was the very best thing to win the old woman's heart.

She was an old woman now—no doubt about it; and years ripen and sweeten many women to an almost incredible degree. Besides, as Silence often whispered to her husband when little things jarred upon him and irritated him, she was his mother, and she loved him—in her own odd way, perhaps, but with a love of which there could be no doubt and no denial. Still even love can work no miracles, nor blend together opposing natures, characters, and lives into sudden and everlasting harmony; and when, having nursed her "child," as she called Silence, into comparative health, and given her grandchild his grandfather's name, Mrs. Jardine proposed to go home, earnestly begging her son to leave Blackhall,

and come and settle in Richerden—Roderick gently but steadily declined. He did not say so, even to his own wife; but he felt it would be far better that he should continue to live at Blackhall and his mother and sisters at Richerden.

All, and especially Bella, were "quite well and happy," Mrs. Jardine said. How much she knew of the events of last Christmas, or the differences between Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Thomson, did not transpire. At all events, she never talked about these troubles: it was not "respectable."

But, despite their diverse way of viewing things, there was a straightforwardness and right-heartedness about Roderick's mother, which, when her son saw it with

fresh, clear eyes, and especially through his wife's eyes, sufficed to blind him wholesomely to her faults. No fear of any more "difficulties" to the end of their days. And when, the last Sunday she was with him, he went, a little against his will, but just to please her, to the ugly Presbyterian church six miles off, and, sitting between his wife and his mother, listened to the singing, rather nasal and drawling, but not unsweet, of the twenty-third Psalm—

> "My table Thou hast furnished
> In presence of my foes;
> My head with oil Thou dost anoint,
> And my cup overflows,"

his heart melted, for he felt his cup did indeed "overflow."

His "table," too, was likely to be "furnished"—better than he had once had any

hope of. When his mother spoke of business matters, and insisted on his giving up his work at the mill, and living as a "gentleman," he had refused point-blank, declaring his determination to carve out his own fortune, and make his own independent way in the world. But when, on the day of baby's christening, he found that Mrs. Jardine, who never did things by halves, and was as generous in her loves as ungenerous in her dislikes, had settled upon baby's mother—not father—a sum of several thousand pounds—sufficient to remove all fear of the future from the parents' hearts, Roderick was deeply moved,

"She is a good woman—my mother! My father was right to respect her and

love her—as he did, to the very last. God bless them! I have need to be proud of both my parents."

"Yes," said Silence, gently, as she stooped and kissed her son, who lay fast asleep on her lap. But her own life taught her to understand other lives: what they were, and what they might have been.

And her life is all before her still, for she is yet comparatively a young woman, though her boys—and she has several—begin to measure heights with her, and to reckon how soon they will be "up to mother's shoulder." "Father" is a standard which none of them hope to arrive at, either physically, mentally, or morally. To be so tall, so clever, or so good as he

—none of these lads could ever imagine such a thing. They do not merely love him, they adore him. And they are right! or at least two people, their mother and their grandmother, believe so.

Roderick Jardine lives still at Blackhall, keeping up the old family home in comfort, but yet in great simplicity, as is wisest, with his increasing family. Besides, his early experiences have given him a horror of luxury, of that wealth which is mere wealth and nothing more. The Jardines of Blackhall hold themselves to be truly "rich" people, because they always have a little more than they spend; they use their money without abusing it, and therefore enjoy it to the uttermost, and cause others beside them-

selves to enjoy it too. But their sons are all brought up to abhor extravagance, waste, or self-indulgence, aware that each will have to make his own way in the world, as is best for every man, and woman, too, perhaps. Sometimes, Roderick says, if he had many girls he would bring them up, like the boys, to earn their own living—as their mother once did—so that they might taste the sweetness of independent bread, and never be tempted to marry for aught but love. But he has only one girl, his little "Tacita"—her right name is Silence, though he will not have her called so. They say it is "one of papa's odd ways"—Roderick will have a good many "odd ways" as he grows older.

He may never be, strictly speaking, a "great" man, but everybody recognizes him as a man of very considerable talent —"known in the gates" as his wife delightedly sees, every year more and more; though by his pen rather than his personality, for he seldom goes from home, except once a year to Richerden to see his mother and the family. A not too attractive family; still he is very kind to them, even to Mrs. Alexander Thomson and her numerous brood of sickly, ill-tempered children, whom she brings with her sometimes to get a breath of wholesome life, within and without, in the happy atmosphere of Blackhall.

"Young Mrs. Jardine," as she continues to be called, for old Mrs. Jardine may live

to be ninety, still looks so young, so fair! her peaceful contented heart shining through her "heavenly" eyes. The world has never heard of her, never will hear, except through her husband and her sons. She does not greatly "shine in society," though she is well able to keep up the dignity of the family wherever she goes. But of her own dignity, her own praise, she thinks very little; having, indeed, far too many other and more important things to think about. As wife, as mother, as mistress, her burdens are often pretty heavy, but never more than she can bear. And he helps her, as she helps him—the husband of her youth; who will, please God, be the faithfullest, fondest lover of her old age.

That time is still a good way off, and they may yet have much to bear together. They will bear it, because it is borne together. And I think, if anyone were to ask Roderick Jardine what has been—in plain English—the backbone of his life, his preservation from evil, his incentive to all good, he would say it was that strong first love and venturous early marriage; because he had sense to see and to take hold of the blessing that heaven dropped in his path—that treasure "above rubies" which many men desire, few win, and fewer still deserve to win. He says, sometimes, that he should like to have carved on his tombstone, as the root of all his happiness, all his success, that line, written by one great and good man of another

—perhaps the noblest man of this century—

"Who loved one woman, and who clave to her."

"But," he adds, "it was because that woman was Silence Jardine."

THE END.

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